

Peace activist hopes pope will go to Sarajevo

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Jim Douglass hopes that someday soon Serbian snipers will have Pope John Paul II and Serbia's Orthodox Patriarch Pavle within their sights.

Instead of shooting at the religious leaders, however, Douglass hopes the Bosnian Serbs will instead be moved by the sight, put down their rifles, and contemplate ending their slaughter of Bosnia's multi-religious people.

To that end, Douglass is attempting to persuade the pope and the Serbian patriarch to join Muslim and Jewish leaders in a pilgrimage to Sarajevo, where they would march in an interfaith parade past the city's religious sites. The parade would display the Catholic and Orthodox crosses, the Muslim crescent and the Jewish Star of David, and end in the city's marketplace which was bombed Feb. 5.

"The religious symbols and traditions of Bosnia are being used by many of the politicians as the basis for genocide," Douglass said in an interview on Saturday, April 30, at St. Bernard's Institute, 1100 S. Goodman St. "We have to respond to that."

Douglass was interviewed after giving the keynote speech in an all-day conference on nonviolence at SBI. The conference was co-sponsored by SBI, Pax Christi of Rochester, the Seamless Garment Network, Common Ground of Upstate, N.Y., and Corpus Christi and St. Mary's parishes in Rochester.

In addition to being a leading Catholic proponent of Christian nonviolence, Douglass is a longtime anti-nuclear arms activist. He was one of several nonviolent thinkers who influenced Vatican II's positive stance

toward conscientious objection and its condemnation of total war.

Currently, he co-directs Mary's House, a Catholic Worker house of hospitality for homeless families in Birmingham, Ala., with his wife, Shelley.

Douglass traveled to the former Yugoslavia Aug. 15-23, 1993, and Feb. 1-10 this year. He fasted for 51 days in Rome from Feb. 11 to Easter Sunday, praying that the pope would go to Sarajevo.

Religious leaders of all faiths in the Balkans, including the pope and the patriarch, have expressed interest in the idea, Douglass noted. He added that Bosnia's Muslim leader, Reis ul-ulema Mustafa Ceric, invited the world's religious leaders to come to Sarajevo in February. Bosnians are looking to the world's religious leaders for understanding and aid because they have given up on any efforts by politicians, Douglass noted.

Religion has been a sorely misunderstood element in the Balkans conflict, Douglass explained during the interview. He pointed out that religious symbols in Bosnia have been twisted into symbols of nationalistic glory. The Serbs, for example, use an Orthodox hand gesture normally associated with the Trinity as a symbol for victory now, he said.

"It is sacrilege to identify the Trinity with the killing of tens of thousands of innocent people," Douglass said.

Not only are the lives of thousands endangered by Serb separatists — and to a lesser extent, Croat separatists — but the very idea of religious tolerance throughout the world is threatened by the Balkans war, Douglass stressed.

"What we believe in this country, that the people of different faiths can live together, is what's at stake there," Douglass said.

That threat to mutual understanding was most starkly illustrated on Feb. 5 when Sarajevo's central marketplace was bombed, killing more than 60 Muslims, Orthodox, Catholics and Jews who regularly shopped there in peace, Douglass said. Such religious co-existence is anathema to the separatist factions in the former Yugoslavia.

"The war is not between different peoples," he said. "The war is between those who say 'We cannot live together,' and those who say 'We can and must live together.'"

In a sadly ironic twist, at the very moment of the bombing, Douglass was meeting with one of Bosnia's seven presidents who was enthusiastic about the idea of an interfaith event in Sarajevo.

"Then he broke down," Douglass recalled in his speech. "It happened as we were talking ... He was learning of the death of his fellow citizens just a few blocks from where we were meeting."

Douglass and the president then headed toward the marketplace, where Douglass recalled stomping through blood and water that reminded him of the piercing of Christ's side at his crucifixion.

Douglass retrieved a rock from the crater left by the bomb and later gave it to Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, president of the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace. The cardinal assured him that the rock would be given to the pope, he said.

Douglass also noted that the pope wants to visit Belgrade, Serbia's capital, and Zagreb, Croatia's capital, in the event of a pilgrimage.

EDITORS' NOTE: Readers who would like to write both the pope and/or Patriarch Pavel in support of an interfaith meeting in the former Yugoslavia can send letters to the following addresses:

Pope John Paul II, c/o Roger Cardinal Etchegaray, President, Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, Piazza San Calisto, 16 Rome 00153, Italy.

His Holiness Patriarch Pavle, Archbishop of Pec, Metropolitan Belgrade, Karlovci Ul, Sedmog Julaero Br. #5, Belgrade, Serbia, Yugoslavia.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Proclaimers of peace

The fifth annual Education for Peace Conference took place at Jefferson Middle School in Rochester's Edgerton Park on April 28. The conference brought together student 'peace ambassadors' from more than 30 schools to share their hopes for peace. (Above) Madelyn Perez performs with the Borinquen Dance Theatre. (Right) Our Mother of Sorrows School Choir sings during the event's conclusion.



TGA surpasses budgeted target

ROCHESTER — The 1993-94 Thanks Giving Appeal has exceeded its budgeted goal of \$3.9 million, marking the first time in three years that the diocese met its goal for the annual fundraiser.

And if previous levels of pledge fulfillment hold true, the Diocese of Rochester may enjoy its largest-ever level of receipts from the appeal — the diocese's chief source of income.

As of April 28, the diocese had received approximately \$4 million in contributions, according to Thomas D'Agostino, director of Annual Giving.

The diocese has received a record \$4.4 million in pledges from some 60,000 people, D'Agostino said. If the traditional fulfillment rate for pledges of 94 percent is met, he continued, the diocese will receive more than \$4.15 million in contributions and set a new record for receipts.

"Most people honor their pledges," D'Agostino said, adding that money raised beyond the budgeted goal "will be put to good use in ministry."

D'Agostino credited the success of this year's appeal to a number of factors, including an improving economy. However, he especially praised parish workers — approximately 450 volunteers — for their efforts.

"The credit is really due to parish volunteers and pastors," D'Agostino said. "They were well organized."

He noted that parishes conducted individual leadership campaigns to solicit large donations from individuals capable of doing so, set realistic goals, and carried out follow-up activities to help meet them.

But even as the current campaign continues — with a closing date of June 30 — D'Agostino is already preparing for the 1994-95 TGA.

Thomas Maguire, a parishioner of Rochester's St. Thomas the Apostle Church, 4536 St. Paul Blvd., has been named campaign chairman. In-hall weekends have been scheduled for Oct. 29-30 as well as Nov. 5-6 and 12-13.

Meanwhile, D'Agostino is reviving use of the priests advisory committee, which has been inactive for several years. He is currently recruiting pastors from each region of the diocese to assist the committee. That group will begin meeting later in May or June to help plan next year's campaign, he said.

— Lee Strong