

DIOCESAN NEWS

Finger-imaging four get conditional discharge

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Four people — including two priests — arrested in connection with a finger-imaging protest at a Monroe County welfare office in March, were sentenced to conditional discharge April 29 by Rochester City Court Judge Ann Pfeiffer.

The four defendants — Father Paul English, CSB, Father Richard C. O'Connell, Jan Bezila and John "Pat" O'Hara — were originally charged with third-degree criminal trespass. They agreed to plead guilty to the reduced charge of simple trespass — a non-criminal violation — according to Jim Gocker, the foursome's attorney.

Each of the protesters must pay a mandatory \$45 New York state court fee, Gocker said. The four can avoid any jail time as long as they stay out of trouble with the law for one year.

"I don't intend to make any trouble," Father English commented later.

Nonetheless, Father English said he had no regrets



From left, Sister Grace Miller, RSM, Drayphus Johnson Sr., Gloria Ruocco, RSM, and Patricia McCormick protest the fingerprinting of welfare recipients outside the Department of Social Services March 18. In a separate incident later that day, four Rochester people were arrested for protesting in the DSS office.

about participating in a protest at the Monroe County Department of Social Services offices at 111 Westfall Road on March 18.

With the support of the other three protesters, Father English had asked to be electronically finger-imaged at the office to show his solidarity with welfare recipients who must submit to finger-imaging to receive benefits. Af-

ter DSS employees refused Father English's request, the four protesters were arrested when they refused to leave the building.

"I have to say that I felt it was a privilege to stand up and speak on behalf of the people who are poor and being treated as criminals when they're not," Father English said.

Bezila's echoed Father English's statements.

"I think we all felt it was worth doing," she said of getting arrested. "It was a protest against finger-imaging that I saw as demeaning to the poor. It's kind of a growing attitude in our society of blaming the poor for our growing ills."

Designed to stop welfare fraud, finger-imaging was instituted by the county last year for recipients of Home Relief, a program for able-bodied childless adults. The March 18 protest came on the heels of an announcement earlier that month that DSS was expanding finger-imaging to include heads of households receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

Vatican, Jewish basic accord inspires unique area agreement

By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

The relationship between the Rochester area's Catholic and Jewish communities has been set in writing, in an agreement believed unique in the country.

The agreement, to be signed in a public ceremony Wednesday, May 8, formalizes long-standing cooperation. It also sets a basis for further work together to fight anti-semitism, racism and anti-Catholicism, and to promote mutual respect through communication, accurate teaching and awareness of contemporary issues.

"When the bishop or anyone on the diocesan side is concerned about issues, whether health care, the elderly or physician-assisted suicide, he will have a ready-made counterpart on the Jewish side to call and say, 'Is there anything the two of us can do together,'" said Father Joseph Brennan, chairman of the task force that developed the agreement. "There will be issues on which we do not agree, but those we do agree on are far greater."

Although the agreement mentions "a number of things that are being done around the country," Dr. Eugene Fisher told the *Catholic Courier*, "What is distinctive, is formalizing it, and the process that went into developing it. I haven't seen anything exactly like it."

Fisher is associate director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the National Council of Catholic Bishops.

"I think it is a wonderful model," Fisher added.

Fisher will speak at the 7:30 p.m. document signing at the Strong Museum, with Rabbi Leon Klenicki, director of Interfaith Affairs of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith. Bishop Matthew H. Clark, Rabbi Alan Katz of the Rochester Board of Rabbis, and Roberta Borg, president of the Jewish Community Federation, will sign the agreement.

The process of developing the agreement took nearly two years. Six Catholics and six Jews met monthly and, in turn, consulted numerous religious leaders while writing seven drafts.

The agreement process began, according to Father Brennan, when Father John Pawlikowski, OSM, spoke in early 1994 in Rochester. The professor from the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago talked about the Vatican-Israeli historic accord of mutual recognition signed Dec.

30, 1993.

"I think the accord affected most directly the situation in Israel. Indirectly it probably removed an obstacle to Jewish participation in the United States and elsewhere," Pawlikowski told the *Courier* last week. "There was always the feeling, I'm not sure always correctly, that the Vatican didn't formally recognize Israel and therefore there was a reluctance to get overly involved in Catholic-Jewish relations."

The accord inspired local response, as did Pawlikowski's comments — on the accord's significance for reconciliation, its "final seal on the process begun at Vatican II to rid Christianity of all vestiges of displacement theology," and its acknowledgment of Jews as a people, not just as individuals or a religion.

After the professor's talk, Father Brennan recalled that Father Bruce Ammering of Rochester, in casual conversation, mentioned, "Wouldn't it be nice if we did something locally?"

Father Brennan took the idea to Bishop Clark and Jewish leaders.

"There was a lot of interest on both sides," said Father Brennan, director of religious affairs at the University of Rochester.

When the resulting task force began meeting, Jewish and Catholic people already were meeting in, or formed, separate interest groups as clergy, as educators, as social workers, and as activists for social justice.

Such gatherings are the crux of the agreement. Deacon Brian McNulty, diocesan ecumenical coordinator, said the local accord "is not to say we support the state of Israel no matter what happens. It is to acknowledge we live together in the same place at the same time."

"The document was actually secondary," Father Brennan said. "We're more concerned with getting people together from each side who have common

interests."

Clergy, for example, have met for about six months and have talked about interfaith marriages, their impact on religious observances and continued involvement in church and synagogue.

"We knew each other was there. Now we have faces," Katz, task force member and spiritual leader of Temple Sinai, Penfield, said. He added that the communities have had a mutual respect and "wonderful relations to begin with." Teens from the temple have visited Sacred Heart Cathedral and Bishop Clark, and adults at the temple have heard Joseph Kelly of Nazareth College speak on Catholicism, for example. The agreement is a way to strengthen relations, he said.

In formalizing those relations, the agreement addresses commitments to:

- freedom of religion and conscience
- combating anti-semitism, racism and anti-Catholicism
- fostering knowledge and respect by promoting communication, accurate teaching, transmission of moral and ethical values, and awareness of issues.

It wasn't long ago, Father Brennan and McNulty recalled, that Catholics prayed for the "perfidious Jews" during Good Friday litanies; and promoted theology that relegated Jews, cursed and homeless, to wander the earth because of their supposed collective sin of killing Christ. Mc-

Nulty recalled that Catholic church bells, especially on Good Friday, provoked fear in European Jews of "the haranguing that often led to riots and persecution."

The Second Vatican Council's *Nostra Aetate* began a "major theological revolution," according to Pawlikowski, setting the record straight that there was "never any basis for a blanket accusation of deicide" and that Jews and Christians share a bondedness.

The revolution, however, has taken time and effort, McNulty said. Just as religious leaders have had to talk through concerns, he said, "People have got to understand what their own tradition is, first. Then you come in with a sense, 'I've got so much to share.' This is where lifelong learning comes into place.

"There is so much more to being Jewish than the Holocaust," McNulty said. "Can we understand what the different festivals are, and other things that are a part of their culture?"

"Christians have gone back and made the Old Testament Christian," he continued. "Is it possible for us to read it as a complete book, and to say, yes, we have an understanding? Can we be empathetic to that point of view?"

The agreement does not imply "a great event" will be staged every other month, he said, but rather, it should become part of the fiber of everyday lives.

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