

# Pax Christi marks 25 years of work to end war

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

During the Persian Gulf War, Father Paul English, CSB, had a standard retort for those who said to protest the war was to go against the United States and allied troops fighting Iraq.

"I used to say, 'You want them to be in harm's way, and I don't. So who supports them?'" recalled Father English, director of campus ministry at St. John Fisher College.

Father English also belongs to the Rochester chapter of Pax Christi USA, a Catholic peace organization based in Erie, Pa., that has been struggling to keep both troops and civilians out of harm's way for 25 years.

Since its inception, PCUSA has worked against the Vietnam and Persian Gulf wars, as well as nuclear weapons, land mines, arms sales, racism, sexism and economic injustice.

Pax Christi members told the *Catholic Courier* that PCUSA particularly concentrates on eliminating, but that it also subscribes to the church's consistent ethic of life that adds abortion, euthanasia and poverty to the list of evils threatening people. Indeed, many Pax Christi members have protested at both military facilities and abortion clinics, explained Jan Bezila, coordinator of the Rochester chapter.

Father English noted that it was Pax Christi's opposition to all forms of killing that attracted him to the organization.

"I was happy to be involved with people in the Rochester area who shared a commitment to nonviolence and the consistent ethic of life," he said.

According to information from PCUSA, the organization — which operates under the umbrella of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops — has 12,000 members in 500 local chapters, including the Rochester one which Bezila heads.

Bezila said she and one other Rochester member attended PCUSA's silver anniversary celebration in Washington, D.C., Aug. 8-10 this year.

The celebration featured a speech by former Haitian president and ex-priest Jean Bertrand Aristide, and drew 750 people, according to Nancy Small, PCUSA's national coordinator, who spoke to the *Courier* in a phone interview from Erie.

On Aug. 9 — the 52nd anniversary of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki — 69 PCUSA members, including Bezila and another Rochester member, were arrested for demonstrating without a permit in front of the White House. Bezila added that she has an Oct. 8 court date in the nation's capital and faces a \$50 fine for her infraction.

U.S. Catholics who formed PCUSA were inspired to do so by Pax Christi International, started by French and German Catholics after World War II seeking to reconcile their two peoples. From its start, Pax Christi sought church approval for its work, Small said, and here in the United States, 148 bishops are members.

Like Pax Christi International,



CNS/Nancy Wiechec

**A U.S. park policeman arrests an unidentified demonstrator in front of the White House during a Pax Christi protest Aug. 9. Sixty-eight members of the peace group — including two people from Rochester — were arrested when they refused to move from stationary positions. Another person was arrested for crossing a police line.**

PCUSA promotes a threefold approach to promoting peace: prayer; study of issues; and campaigns, as letter-writing campaigns, peace vigils and civil disobedience.

Although many PCUSA members are committed to total nonviolence, PCUSA does not require prospective members to sign any pledges of pacifism, Small said. Hence, some PCUSA members subscribe to the church's just war theory, which says that, in certain limited cases, war is permissible, she added.

"We're not a pacifist organization," Small said. "It allows people who have a sincere interest in nonviolence to join others who share that interest."

However, she added that PCUSA has officially come out in favor of ending the church's endorsement of the just war doctrine. In brief, the doctrine — which is summarized in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* — allows for a defensive war against an aggressor if the following conditions are met:

- The damage inflicted by the aggressor must be lasting, grave and certain.

- All other means of putting an end to (aggression) must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective.

- There must be serious prospects of success.

- The defensive war must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated — a factor that weighs heavily in labeling a war "just" given today's modern means of destruction.

But some Pax Christi members insist to end any allowance for just war doctrine.

For example, Mark Scibilia-Carver, who has participated in Pax Christi actions, was given a consistent life ethic award by the Diocese of Rochester this year for his work with such organizations as PCUSA and St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, a Catholic Worker facility in Rochester.

A parishioner at St. James Church, Trumansburg, Scibilia-Carver adamantly opposes the

just war doctrine as antithetical to Christ's nonviolent way of life.

In a phone interview, Scibilia-Carver likened the church's allowing for both conscientious objection and just war doctrine to allowing both a pro-life and pro-choice stance on abortion. The church would never consider a pro-abortion position "Catholic," he said, yet it still allows Catholics to go to war in good conscience.

Christians were pacifists for the church's first three centuries,

he added. He pointed out that when the Roman Empire recognized Christianity as a legitimate faith, however, the church left behind its nonviolence and allowed its members to serve in the military.

"It would have been unimaginable for a priest to be in a pastoral situation with someone in the military in the early days of the church and not tell them to get out," he said.

Scibilia-Carver's position was echoed by Bezila and Father English.

"It's important to say that the just war theory and Christian nonviolence cannot be held as two options," Bezila said.

She pointed to such theologians as Father Bernard Haring, CSSR, author of several moral texts used in seminaries, to buttress her point. For example, Father Haring wrote in his 1986 book *The Healing Power of Peace and Nonviolence*:

"Refusal of the way of nonviolence is ... heresy of the worst kind ... It is not possible to speak of Christ's sacrifice while ignoring the role of nonviolence."

Father English added that even if Catholics took only the just war doctrine seriously, virtually all wars would still be opposed by the church because almost none could meet just war criteria.

"If people earnestly tried to exhaust every possibility (to stop war) there would never be war again," he said.



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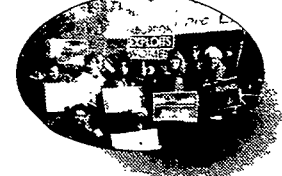
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