

DIOCESAN NEWS

Pickers urge LaFalce to oppose army school

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

SPENCERPORT — Father Jim Callan, administrator of Corpus Christi Church in Rochester, visited El Salvador in 1990. While there, he stopped in at the chapel of Divine Providence Hospital in the capital, San Salvador.

It was there, 10 years earlier, that pro-government gunmen shot Oscar Arnulfo Romero, San Salvador's archbishop, who was celebrating Mass for 100 people.

Although the archbishop had condemned killing by both rightists and leftists in the country's civil strife, he had earned the ire of rightists because he publicly criticized the Salvadoran army. Father Callan said he saw the memorial display of the slain archbishop's blood-stained garments in the hospital chapel.

"It was very powerful and very moving," Father Callan said as he stood outside U.S. Rep. John J. LaFalce's Union Street office March 24.

Father Callan was among 40 demonstrators who held a one-hour vigil outside the Democratic congressman's Spencerport office to commemorate the archbishop's death on March 24, 1980. The prayer vigil was organized by several area peace

activists, including members of the Rochester Committee on Latin America and the Rochester chapter of Pax Christi USA, a Catholic peace group.

The vigil participants chose the parking lot outside LaFalce's office because the congressman, who represents New York's 29th district — which includes western Monroe County — has voted to fund the U.S. Army School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Ga. The demonstrators delivered to LaFalce's office staff a large card with Archbishop Romero's picture on it. The card, which they had all signed, asked LaFalce to end his support for the SOA.

A training institute for thousands of Latin American soldiers since the 1940s, the SOA graduated two of the gunmen who killed Archbishop Romero. Dozens of other SOA graduates have been implicated in the killing, torture and repression of Latin Americans. Indeed, SOA opponents claim the school has trained its graduates to terrorize Latin America's poor, and, in particular, the region's Catholic church workers.

But SOA supporters claim the school's training, at least since the early 1990s, has actually helped to curb human rights abuses by professionalizing its graduates. In several statements, U.S. Army officials have



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Steve Aman, right, and Tom Harris participate in a vigil outside U.S. Rep. John LaFalce's office, Union Street, Spencerport, March 24.

also pointed out that the majority of the school's graduates have not been convicted of committing human rights abuses.

LaFalce was among 217 members of Congress who voted in September to continue funding the SOA, versus 210 against it. Both sides enjoyed significant support from both Democrats and Republicans.

On March 30, LaFalce's Washington, D.C. office faxed the *Catholic Courier* an explanation of his SOA support.

"Only a tiny minority — about one-half of one percent (of SOA graduates) — have

been implicated in human rights violations or other misconduct after graduation," LaFalce wrote. "The vast majority of SOA graduates have gone on to help build a more solid foundation for democracy in their native countries."

He added that he supported human rights training at the SOA, and the screening of students for past rights abuses.

"I will continue to scrutinize the work of the School of the Americas, and will make my judgments accordingly," he concluded.

Last November, 601 protesters were arrested for criminal trespass at the SOA. Twenty-five of them received six-month jail sentences. Vigil participants at LaFalce's office wore signs emblazoned with the names of protesters who got jail time.

"We're living in a society where training assassins is legal, but protesting the training of assassins is illegal," said Father Callan, who wore a sign with the name of Richard Streb, a Rochester native who now lives in Virginia.

John W. Honeck, a parishioner at Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Brockport, and a member of Pax Christi, was among those arrested at Fort Benning, and said he was barred from the facility.

"I just believe that Jesus would want us to love our neighbors and our enemies," he said. "I just want to follow that kind of nonviolent love that he expects of us, and, certainly, the school doesn't express that."

WORC gets \$15,000 Bell Atlantic grant

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Bell Atlantic Foundation has awarded the Worker Ownership Resource Center (WORC) a \$15,000 grant to expand the Internet services it provides to entrepreneurs.

The foundation, which is funded by the telecommunications company of the same name, awarded the grant in a press conference at WORC's Geneva office on March 25, according to Thomas Owens, Bell Atlantic's director of community affairs in Syracuse.

With offices in Geneva and Elmira, WORC is an independent, not-for-profit

agency that was established through funding from the Diocese of Rochester and the U.S. bishops' Campaign for Human Development in the early 1990s. Through its training programs, mentoring services and small-loan fund, WORC helps low-income people to become self-employed and start businesses.

The Bell Atlantic grant will help WORC further its aims of promoting small businesses via the World Wide Web, according to Kevin Hennessy, WORC's executive director.

"Use of the Internet and advanced telecommunications is increasingly important to the success of both large and small businesses," Hennessy said. "Rural

businesses, in particular, can benefit from this technology which enables them to reach wider markets outside their immediate area. This grant will help us to equip the entrepreneurs in our program with the tools they need to compete in this new information economy."

According to WORC, the program has trained 576 people to start up or expand 225 businesses within the Finger Lakes and Southern Tier regions of the diocese. WORC clients are offered training and mentoring, and can apply for small loans to start up their businesses.

WORC currently promotes a handful of its businesses on its Web site, which lists

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