

# DIOCESAN NEWS

## Social justice activists condemn Nike practices

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

Catholic-school teams would never be allowed to wear donated jerseys with the words "Planned Parenthood" on them, observed former athlete Jim Keady. Yet some Catholic-school teams wear donated Nike gear in spite of the company's association with abusive labor practices condemned by the church.

Then again, Catholics know their church has condemned Planned Parenthood, which supports abortion and artificial contraception, said Keady, who played professional soccer with the New Jersey Imperials. But not enough Catholics realize that companies like Nike abuse their work forces in a manner that fundamentally violates Catholic social-justice teachings on labor, he added.

"We're very up on the sexual agenda, but the social agenda takes a back seat, and we need to get up to speed on that," said Keady, a Catholic.

Keady made these statements after and during his presentation about Nike at Our Lady of Mercy High School in Brighton on the morning of March 7. Keady and his co-presenter, Catholic social justice advocate Leslie Kretzu, are the co-directors of Educating for Justice, an anti-sweatshop group that maintains a Web site at [www.nikewages.org](http://www.nikewages.org).

The presentation combined music from Rage Against the Machine and The Beatles with a slide show documenting alleged Nike injustices. The duo also called on audience members to participate in skits depicting ways in which female workers reportedly were mistreated by supervisors and company doctors in Indonesian factories under contract to Nike.

Keady and Kretzu's visit to the Rochester area included stops at the University of Rochester on March 6 and at Nazareth College on the evening of March 7. The duo were invited to Rochester by the Rochester Labor-Religion Coalition, which includes representatives of the Diocese of Rochester. The diocese itself is currently investigating the labor practices of manufacturers who create apparel and other items for Catholic schools, according to Sister of Mercy Janet Korn, social-justice awareness coordinator



McQuaid Jesuit basketball players Jon Matt (from left), Alfonso Evans and Nick Struble talk with Jim Keady, an anti-sweatshop activist, at Our Lady of Mercy High School in Brighton March 7.

Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

for diocesan Catholic Charities.

In Keady and Kretzu's audience at Mercy were some members of the basketball team at Rochester's McQuaid Jesuit High School, which was criticized by labor-religion coalition members last fall for accepting a donation of footwear and warm-up suits from Nike. After the presentation, three members of the team spoke with Keady.

"We were concerned about the deal that we had," said Alfonso Evans, a McQuaid senior and a starting forward who came to the event with teammates Jon Matt and Nick Struble. "We came out to get basic information."

Although the players did not commit to anything, Keady encouraged them to consider protesting the Nike donation by placing black tape over the Nike "swooshes" — the company's famed trademark logo — on their sneakers. Currently in contention for a state championship, McQuaid won a New York state Class A quarterfinal game on March 9 in Buffalo, and will next play Saturday, March 16, in Glens Falls.

Jesuit Father Frederick Betti, who teaches a social-justice course for juniors at McQuaid, accompanied the players and sever-

al other McQuaid students to the presentation. Father Betti said he disliked the fact that Kretzu repeatedly referred to the Nike donation to McQuaid as a "contract" between the school and the company, a misrepresentation he said somewhat hurt Kretzu's credibility. Overall, however, he said the presentation was helpful in teaching his students to grapple with the fact that much of what they wear is made in sweatshop conditions.

Keady and Kretzu founded their group in an effort to call Nike to accountability for its labor practices in the Third World. Similarly, the group has targeted such other apparel manufacturers as Reebok, Adidas, Tommy Hilfiger and The Gap for alleged sweatshop abuses of the people who make their products. Charges the two made against Nike's contract factories included the payment of "starvation" wages to workers; the burning of manufacturing materials in villages where people, including children, were regularly exposed to toxic fumes; the sexual harassment of female workers; the lack of sufficient bathroom breaks for workers; and the suppression of labor unions through intimidation, kidnapping, rape, torture and murder of labor activists.

After the company declined Keady's offer to work in a Nike factory in Indonesia for six months, the duo decided to live in Indonesia for two months in 2000 to document Nike workers' lives. They only spent \$1.25 a day each, the same salary that an Indonesian apparel worker would make at a Nike factory in the summer of 2000. (Wages have increased slightly since then, according to Nike). Contrary to Nike's contention that the wage is adequate, the duo said they both lost considerable weight, felt exhausted much of the time, and sometimes had to choose between buying food and medicine.

The duo emphasized that they were not calling for anyone to boycott Nike. Instead, they want consumers — young people, in particular — who buy Nike goods to ask the company to support the right of workers to organize independent unions; allow independent monitors to visit its factories; and to pay a "living wage" to workers. A living wage is defined by activists as an amount that would enable a family of four to obtain adequate food, clothing and shelter on the income of one breadwinner.

In various statements Nike has dismissed Keady as a publicity-seeker who discounts the company's attempts to improve conditions for its workers. The company lists these attempts on its corporate Web site, [www.nike.com](http://www.nike.com). Among them are cooperating with certain independent monitors; improving manufacturing safety standards in its Indonesian factories; and paying wages that are better than what workers in Third World countries would obtain through other kinds of employment.

Keady and Kretzu, however, say the manufacturer has only made "cosmetic changes" in its factories, and that if Nike and other apparel manufacturers were really interested in their workers, they would share some of their executives' wealth with the people who are creating their products. While Nike workers live on less than two dollars a day, Nike's chief executive officer, Philip Knight, was recently named one of the 500 richest men in the world, Keady said. Meanwhile, sports heroes like golfer Tiger Woods and basketball player Michael Jordan also make millions from their Nike endorsements.

"If this is leadership, it's pathetic," Keady said.

## Obituary

### Father Benedict Ehmann, 97; was social, liturgical reformer

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

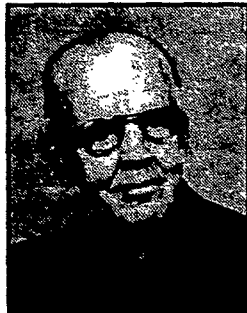
Father Benedict A. Ehmann, a pioneer in social-justice and liturgical movements in the Diocese of Rochester, died March 11, 2002, at St. Joseph's Convent Infirmary after a long illness.

He had been the oldest living diocesan priest, having celebrated his 97th birthday on Jan. 3.

Father Ehmann was a native of St. Boniface Parish in Rochester. He was ordained June 6, 1929, at St. Patrick's Cathedral by Bishop John O'Hern. He served two years as associate pastor of St. Patrick's Cathedral, then taught church music and English at St. Andrew's Seminary until 1938. He was director of music and liturgy at St. Bernard's Seminary from 1938-47.

During these years, Father Ehmann met renowned activist Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker movement, and was instrumental in bringing Day to Rochester to speak. From there, Father Ehmann spearheaded a movement that led to the 1941 opening of St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, a Rochester facility that continues to serve the poor to this day. He later formed letter-writing groups for Amnesty International.

In 1947, Father Ehmann began a 14-year pastorate at St. Mary of the Lake Parish in Watkins Glen. He also was the founding pastor of St. Benedict's in neigh-



ers at the time.

"Vocations to the ministerial priesthood come through the example of dedicated priests. Father Ehmann was that dedicated priest for us," the Beligotti brothers said in a statement. "He was our mentor, spiritual father and dear friend."

The Beligottis also noted that Father Ehmann encouraged St. Mary of the Lake congregations to be musical, commenting that he "knew so well that singing gets the truth from our heads down to our hearts."

In 1961 Father Ehmann moved from the quiet of Schuyler County to St. Michael's Parish in Rochester, where he would serve until his 1974 retirement. His pastorate came at a time of significant social transition on the city's east side, noted Father John T. Reif, St. Michael's assistant pastor from 1970-74.

"What he tried to do was to bridge the gap between the older, solidly established ethnic groups and the new arrivals, most-

ly from Puerto Rico with a few Cubans," said Father Reif, now parochial vicar at Holy Cross Parish in Charlotte.

Father Reif said that Father Ehmann was a respected figure to both Catholics and non-Catholics in the neighborhood: "He would sit in his office for hours, talking to mothers and grandmothers who were lined up, helping them unravel the social-service red tape. And in his 60s, he went to the University of Rochester to learn Spanish."

Another key component of Father Ehmann's legacy was his foresight on liturgical changes. He was actively involved with the Liturgical Conference, an association begun in 1940 to promote greater understanding of the liturgy and wider involvement of the laity.

"I think one thing that all the priests would agree on is that he was genuinely pastoral and liturgical, and forward-looking for years before his time," Father Reif said. For example, he added, "What he and others were trying to do for years was restore the ancient time of the Easter Vigil into the night hour. When it finally happened, he was ecstatic."

In 1974 Father Ehmann retired to Rochester's Holy Apostles Church, where he remained until moving to the St. Joseph's Convent Infirmary in 1997. During his retirement, Father Ehmann continued to minister regularly, Father Paul Tomasso said.

"In recent years he still never turned anyone away from the door," said Father Tomasso, who is pastor of Holy Apostles and two other west-side parishes.

Father Tomasso also visited Father Ehmann frequently at the infirmary. "He was very healthy; he was not on medications and was very alert. He followed news of the church closely and was interested always in life," Father Tomasso said, adding that Father Ehmann had remained chaplain of the Third Order Dominicans, a devotional group that met with him once a month.

"For a man who was 97 years old, his mind was exceptionally clear. He was always there for Mass, right up until just a few days ago," said Sister Joseph Gilmory Russell, SSJ, infirmary coordinator.

Calling hours were set for Thursday, March 14, from 2 to 4 p.m. and 7 to 9 p.m. at the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse, 4095 East Avenue, Pittsford, followed by evening prayer at 7:30 p.m. in the motherhouse chapel. Father Ehmann's funeral Mass will take place March 15 in the motherhouse chapel at 10:30 a.m., with Bishop Matthew H. Clark presiding. Interment will be at Holy Ghost Cemetery.

Father Ehmann is survived by his sister-in-law, Laurretta Ehmann; nephews David and James Ehmann; nieces Rita Ehmann and Sister Clare Ehmann, SSJ; and several grandnieces, grandnephews and cousins.