

Anti-war protesters march in D.C.

Willy Thorn/CNS

WASHINGTON — Numerous Catholic representatives were among tens of thousands of demonstrators who braved bitter cold Jan. 18 in Washington to protest a possible U.S. war on Iraq.

"I want to be an alternate voice to the madness," Maria Scharfenberger, a social worker from a Louisville, Ky., Catholic Worker house of hospitality, told Catholic News Service. "The direction we're headed in is very scary ... the message is not loud enough or clear enough. There are an awful lot who don't want war."

Under a blue sky burned cloudless and clear by the cold, some of those "awful lot" gathered on the national Mall in a motley mass — of people, banners and tables full of informational books and pamphlets — that resonated with beating drums, smelled of burning sage and sprawled from the U.S. Capitol to the Washington Monument.

Some participants took to the trees to see over the crowd, packed shoulder to shoulder against a bitter chill that never topped 24 degrees. Some sought respite in idling buses and the museums that line the Mall.

"I wanted to walk in the steps of Francis (of Assisi) and remind people peace is what we need to be about," Franciscan Brother Ray Smith said.

His order gathers once a year, he added, and the Washington rally seemed a "wonderful way to get together as a family for something we believe. Francis was always trying to reconcile."

Sister Genevieve Cassani, of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, came on a bus from Missouri and Illinois because "my conscience tells me I have to be here."

On the weekend celebrating the civil rights leader's birth, Sister Genevieve cited the late Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who said that "war is the enemy of the people," and she added, "The people — women, children of Iraq; the poor there — they're the ones who are going to feel the burden of this war."

A group of Benedictine sisters from Emmanuel Monastery in Lutherville, Md., also recalled Rev. King and held a banner reading, "If you want peace, work for justice."

"I think war is not the answer. The U.S. shouldn't be pursuing pre-emptive war. It's un-American," Benedictine Sister Kathleen White said. "I came to support international cooperation as a valid means to achieve peace."

St. Gregory the Great Parish



Martin Lueders/CNS

Tens of thousands of people from across the nation braved sub-freezing temperatures to demonstrate Jan. 18 near the U.S. Capitol in Washington against possible military action in Iraq.

member Richard Starkey came to the march from New York with a busload of 55 from Manhattan's Upper West Side after noticing an ad in the church bulletin.

"We feel very strongly about the need to avoid war," he said. "And more Catholics and Americans would be here if we had the leadership of our elected leaders."

Locally, some 50 members of Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish in the Washington suburb of Arlington, Va., showed up.

Parishioner Dan Cassidy said, "Our Lady is the queen of peace. So we're here trying to live our faith — to put it simply."

Organized by several peace groups, including International ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism), United for Peace and Win Without War, the Jan. 18 rally included two hours of speeches and a march from the Mall to the gates of the Washington Navy Yard.

Anti-war protesters also gathered the same day for marches in other cities — Indianapolis, Las Vegas and San Francisco; Albuquerque, N.M.; Burlington, Vt.; Charlotte, N.C.; Des Moines, Iowa; Lansing, Mich.; Madison, Wis.; Portland, Ore.; and Tampa and Venice, Fla. — and in other coun-

tries, from cities in Canada to Cairo, Egypt, and Hong Kong, Moscow, Paris and Tokyo.

Canadians held peace rallies, marches and interfaith services in more than 20 cities and towns from coast to coast.

In the Canadian capital of Ottawa, about 3,000 protesters — including some from church-based organizations — marched from Parliament Hill to the street in front of the U.S. Embassy. Hundreds lay down on a plastic sheet to feign death as an air-raid siren wailed in the background. The action was followed by a moment of silence.

As part of their protest against the possibility of a war, Canadian church groups initiated a statement calling for verifiable rejection of weapons of mass destruction by Iraq. The statement said internationally mandated inspection and ongoing monitoring should be used to prevent Iraq's access to weapons of mass destruction. It also called for a rejection of further war on Iraq, the consequences of which, it said, would be borne primarily by the people.

In Washington, before opening the speech portion of the rally with a new anti-war song, British rockers Chumbawamba shouted to the

crowd, "Sounds like you don't have a lot of respect for your president."

"The world is cold, but our hearts are warm," said the Rev. Jesse Jackson, civil rights leader. "This is America at its best."

Said the Rev. Al Sharpton, founder of the National Action Network, "If Dr. King was here to celebrate his birthday, Mr. Bush, he would not be inside preparing for military buildup. He would be outside saying 'give peace a chance.'"

"The path this administration is on is wrong and we object. It is an immoral war they are planning and we must not be silenced," actress Jessica Lange said. "All this talk of war, all this rhetoric has been an excellent cover, an excellent camouflage, to turn back the clock on civil rights, on women's rights, on social justice and on environmental policies."

Other speakers included Rep. John Conyers Jr., D-Mich.; former Rep. Cynthia McKinney; former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark; and Vietnam veteran and anti-war activist Ron Kovic, author of "Born on the Fourth of July."

"No blood for oil" was the most common theme of the day. Effigies of President Bush abounded, in posters, signs, masks and models.