

# 13 arrested at war protest

## Catholic activists sit in at federal building

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Thirteen anti-war protesters, including several Catholic activists, were arrested mid-morning Ash Wednesday and charged with third-degree criminal trespass for refusing to leave the entryway of the Federal Building in downtown Rochester.

The Protestant and Catholic protesters entered the Federal Building following an ecumenical peace prayer service outside the building on Ash Wednesday, March 5. Among those protesting were representatives of St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, a Catholic Worker shelter in the city; the House of Mercy, a Catholic outreach ministry; Pax Christi Rochester, a Catholic peace group; and Lake Avenue Baptist Church.

According to Jan Bezila, Pax Christi coordinator, before the protest, participants were anointed with ashes made from money burned by the protesters outside the building.

"We were saying that lives are worth more than money," she said. "We wanted to make a point that this war is about profits from oil the U.S. hoped to secure."

Protesters sat down in the entryway and refused to leave when asked several times by a U.S. marshal. Bezila added that the protesters sat in a way that allowed people to get in and out of the building, but that security officials nonetheless rerouted visitors through another entrance.

Five of the protesters, three women and two men, spent the night in Monroe County Jail before being released March 6. The rest of the demonstrators posted bail late in the day on March 5.

Some of the protesters were arraigned last week. Others, who were not accompanied by lawyers at their initial court appearances, were slated to be arraigned in Rochester City Court Judge Ann E. Pfeiffer's chambers this week.

Bezila said the protesters met with their lawyers on March 7, and that it was likely all of them would enter not-guilty pleas when arraigned. The protesters could face up to six months in jail if convicted, she said, adding that some of the protesters, including Bezila, may choose to represent themselves. She added that such a choice would afford more opportunities to explain her actions, which



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

Some of the 13 anti-war protesters arrested March 5 at Rochester's Federal Building were arraigned in Rochester City Court March 6. Harry Murray, a sociology professor at Nazareth College, speaks with the press after his court appearance, as Mercy Sister Grace Miller looks on.

she said are rooted in her opposition to a U.S. invasion of Iraq.

"We're not guilty by reason of we're doing the right thing," she said.

That sentiment was echoed by her fellow participants in the Ash Wednesday act of civil disobedience. Mercy Sister Grace Miller, who directs the House of Mercy said, "I don't feel we're breaking the law. I feel that we're morally justified in expressing our opposition to the war." She added that she believes North Korea is a greater threat to the United States than is Iraq, but that the Bush administration wants control of Iraq's oil.

Rita Lewis, a House of Mercy staff member and former Sister of Mercy, said she broke the law to make "a very strong statement."

"It's a very immoral and sinful act that the government is waging against Iraq," she said.

Harry Murray, a Nazareth College professor and Catholic Worker member, spent the night in jail after being arrested for his role in the protest.

"It was luxurious," he joked of his jail experience. He noted that he and fellow Catholic Worker Tom Malthaner, who oversees St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, were given a "semi-private room" and not placed with the general inmate population, even though they wished to be. Malthaner said he was motivated to break the law because he felt all other legal means to oppose the war had been exhausted.

"We have to risk our freedom to say how serious it is to stop this immoral war," Malthaner said.

Both men spoke highly of protesters currently living in Iraq, particularly Kathy Kelly, a Chicago Catholic who founded Voices in the Wilderness, a group that has worked to end economic sanctions imposed on Iraq for refusing to comply with disarmament provisions of the agreements that ended the Persian Gulf War. Kelly and other critics claim the sanctions have only hurt Iraq's civilians, not its leaders, whereas those who defend sanctions claim they only remain in place because of the obstinacy of Saddam Hussein.

Malthaner noted that Kelly and other members of a VITW "Peace Team" plan to stay in Iraq in the event of a war.

"They're walking with the people," he said. "They're putting themselves much more at risk than we are. How can we do anything less than risk our freedoms for a cause we deeply believe in?"

Jessica Chapman of Portland, Ore., a staff member at St. Joseph's, also spent the night in jail and expressed frustration similar to Malthaner's about using legal means of protest.

"We're not being heard," she said.

She added that she rejected arguments that the war might benefit the Iraqi people by freeing them from Saddam Hussein's tyranny.

"I believe there are other ways that we can free people around the world," she said. Asked what approach she thought the United States should take toward Iraq, she replied: "Lifting sanctions and minding our own business."

## PROTECTION PROGRAMS TO BE IN PLACE JUNE 30

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Kathleen J. McChesney, executive director of the U.S. bishops' Office for Child and Youth Protection, has told U.S. dioceses they should have comprehensive "safe environment" programs for child protection in place by June 30.

In a paper sent in late February to all dioceses and eparchies — dioceses of Eastern-rite Catholic churches — McChesney outlined the essential elements of such programs. They ranged from education programs for children to training, screening and written conduct codes for adults.

## BOSTON ARCHDIOCESE CUTS BUDGET AGAIN

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The Boston Archdiocese has announced more central budget cutbacks and said Mass attendance was down 14 percent in its annual headcount last fall.

In a letter sent to pastors March 3, Bishop Richard G. Lennon, apostolic administrator, said the archdiocese's central operating budget will be cut by \$4 million in the coming fiscal year. The current year's operating budget was set at \$16 million last June, down 33 percent from the \$24 million budget of the previous year.

## MEXICANS GO TO IRAQ TO BE HUMAN SHIELDS

MEXICO CITY (CNS) — A grandmother and a nun were among nine Mexicans who departed for Iraq March 5 to serve as human shields at a Dominican hospital in Baghdad.

The group, expected to join hundreds of other foreigners acting as human shields in case the United States begins bombing Iraq.

The Mexicans will be arriving in Iraq as a group of 27 volunteers from the British organization Human Shields head home in a double-decker bus.

Human Shields spokesman Jordan Franck said the volunteers left Iraq for a variety of reasons.

"Some of the people ran out of money. Some of them got scared, which was fair enough. They had shown their solidarity," he said in a telephone interview.