

Farm workers press case

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Migrant farm workers and their supporters — including Catholic clergy, religious and lay people — marched all the way from Seneca Falls to Albany last week, hoping to meet New York Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno, whom they blame for holding up legislation that would protect farm workers.

Bruno was unavailable to meet with the marchers, but still the march was a success, according to Bill Abom, coordinator of the interfaith Western New York Office of Rural and Migrant Ministry. The farm workers garnered press coverage in all the communities through which they traveled, and drew attention to their efforts to secure omnibus legislation protecting farm worker rights.

"The pressure is there, and will continue to mount until we get some movement," Abom said.

The march began with a prayer service and rally in Seneca Falls April 21 and ended in Albany Wednesday, April 30, with a rally of about 100 people at the state capitol. Among the speakers at the rally was Bishop Howard Hubbard of the Diocese of Albany. Another group of farm worker supporters marched from Harlem and joined the Seneca Falls group in Albany.

Abom said marchers stayed at Catholic and Protestant churches at several points along the way, and the marchers' route took them from Seneca Falls through Auburn, Syracuse, Utica, Schenectady and other communities.



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

Shirley F. Sobczak, a member of UNITE, a garment workers union, cheers during an April 21 farm worker rally at Women's Rights National Park in Seneca Falls.

The marchers sought the passage of legislation that would give farm workers such rights as collective bargaining, overtime pay, a day of rest and disability insurance. Such legislation has been passed by the Assembly, but it has stalled in the Senate, Abom said, laying the blame at the feet of Bruno.

As in past years, Abom said staff members told the marchers the senator was unavailable to meet with farm worker advocates, but did offer to arrange a meeting with a Bruno aide. The farm worker advocates turned the offer down, Abom said.

"We've met with aides enough," he said.

The *Catholic Courier* contacted Bruno's office for a response, but did not receive a call back before the paper's deadline.

Last year, the omnibus resolution was endorsed by the dioceses of Rochester and Buffalo; Catholic Charities of the Finger Lakes; the New York State Catholic Conference; the New York State Labor-Religion Coalition (which the Rochester diocese supports); Pax Christi-Rochester; the House of Mercy and St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, two Catholic shelters in Rochester; Catholic Family Center of Rochester and of Wayne County; and various parishes and religious orders in the Buffalo and Rochester dioceses.

FIDEL CASTRO RALLIES CUBANS AGAINST U.S.

HAVANA (CNS) — Cuban President Fidel Castro has invoked Christ and Pope John Paul II in rallying Cubans against a possible military invasion by the United States.

"Not even Christ, who expelled the money-changers from the temple with a whip, would stop opting for the defense of the people," said Castro at a May 1 rally in Havana.

Castro expressed his "sincere and deep respect" for the pope and his steadfast opposition to the U.S.-led war against Iraq.

"I'm absolutely sure that he (the pope) never would have advised the Shiites and the Sunnis to let themselves be killed without defending themselves, nor would he advise anything different to the Cubans," he said.

Shiites and Sunnis are followers of different branches of Islam living in Iraq.

Castro added that U.S. President George W. Bush is committed to eliminating him. Cuba's recent crackdown against dissidents is "legitimate defense" against the United States, which is trying to subvert his government, said Castro.

Castro did not mention papal criticism of the execution of three Cubans who tried to hijack a boat to the United States and the pope's call for clemency for nearly 80 dissidents given lengthy sentences after being convicted of being paid agents of the United States working to subvert Castro's rule.

Bush asks Congress to fund emergency AIDS plan

Patricia Zapor/CNS

WASHINGTON — Flanked by congressmen from both parties and members of his Cabinet, President Bush April 29 asked Congress to move forward with funding the emergency plan for dealing with HIV/AIDS that he announced in January.

The cause of fighting AIDS "is rooted in the simplest of moral duties," Bush said at an East Room event that included Washington Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick and other religious leaders as well as diplomats and representatives of agencies working to fight the spread of HIV and to treat AIDS victims.

"Confronting this tragedy is the responsibility of every nation," Bush said, and one the United States par-

ticularly bears because of its founders' belief in the dignity of life.

During his State of the Union address, Bush surprised AIDS activists who had been lobbying for more dramatic U.S. action by announcing an Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. The plan would direct \$15 billion over the next five years to fight AIDS abroad, focusing on 14 African and Caribbean countries where the disease is concentrated.

In the three months since that speech, Bush said, an estimated 760,000 people have died of AIDS, while another 1.2 million people have been infected with HIV and another 175,000 born with HIV.

In defining the extent of the AIDS crisis, Bush explained that nearly 30 million people in Africa are living with HIV or AIDS, including 3 mil-

lion children under age 15. Nearly 40 percent of the adult population of Botswana has HIV, and life expectancy has fallen by more than 30 years, he said.

The House was scheduled to vote in early May on a bill introduced by Rep. Henry Hyde, R-Ill., that has drawn opposition from some members of Congress who are pushing to fund only programs that rely primarily on abstinence to avoid the spread of HIV.

The Hyde bill authorizes spending \$15 billion over the next five years for HIV/AIDS care, treatment and prevention in the countries most affected by the disease. It also would establish a coordinated approach among various U.S. government agencies to treatment and prevention efforts.

Catholic Relief Services, the U.S.

bishops' overseas relief and development agency, is among the humanitarian agencies that have been pushing for greater financial support from the U.S. government in their HIV/AIDS programs worldwide.

Earlier in April, Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson met in Rome with Archbishop Javier Lozano Barragan, the Vatican's health minister, and with members of the Rome-based Sant'Egidio Community.

In 2001, the community, which mediated the Mozambique peace talks in the early 1990s, began a huge project to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS in Mozambique. Thompson's meetings focused on ways Catholic charities and the U.S. government could cooperate in health care projects around the world.