

USCCB, actor set aside spat

Mark Pattison/CNS

WASHINGTON — Actor-director Mel Gibson paid a quick visit to the U.S. bishops' headquarters building in Washington July 21, a month after the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Gibson's Icon Productions were involved in a spat over Gibson's new movie, "The Passion."

Gibson met with Msgr. William P. Fay, USCCB general secretary. "It was a surprise visit," said Msgr. Fay, who had been notified of Gibson's arrival about an hour before it happened.

Msgr. Fay added there was no bad blood between the USCCB and Gibson. "He wanted the visit to make clear that there was not" any animosity, he said of Gibson.

The dispute centered on the use of what Icon Productions said were unauthorized copies of a draft script used by a group of Catholic and Jewish scholars to critique the screenplay.

After the meeting was over, Gibson signed autographs for employees outside USCCB headquarters before stepping inside a waiting taxi. With Gibson was Paul Lauer, hired to do publicity and promotion for "The Passion."

"I thought I was having a private meeting," Msgr. Fay exclaimed when he saw 20 employees, most of them female, huddling around the 47-year-old Gibson for an autograph.

When signing an autograph for Janet Kistler, who works in the bishops' Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, Gibson said, "You're from Pro-Life? I've done my bit." Gibson, a Catholic, is the father of seven children.

Gibson was in Washington to oversee a screening of "The Passion,"



Mary Knight/CNS

Actor Mel Gibson chats with Janet Kistler, an employee of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, as he leaves the bishops' headquarters July 21. Gibson, in town for a screening of his film, "The Passion," met privately with Msgr. William Fay, USCCB general secretary.

which Gibson financed with his own money. The film, whose dialogue is entirely in Latin and Aramaic with no subtitles, has yet to find a distributor.

Among those attending the invitation-only screening, according to *The Washington Post*, were political commentators Peggy Noonan, Cal Thomas, Kate O'Beirne, Michael Novak and Linda Chavez; film director William Peter Blatty; Jack Valenti, head of the Motion Picture Association of America; David Kuo, deputy director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives; former Republican congressman Mark Siljander of Michi-

gan; and Mark Rodgers, staff director of the Senate Republican Conference.

The same day as Gibson's visit, William Donohue of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights blasted an essay written by Paula Fredriksen in the July 28 issue of *The New Republic* magazine over the controversy surrounding "The Passion."

Calling Fredriksen "a demagogue," Donohue said in a statement, "Working with an unauthorized script of 'The Passion,' Paula Fredriksen has declared the movie to be anti-Semitic. ... She has libeled Mel Gibson."

Senate upholds ban on funding

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The House, by a 216-211 vote July 15, maintained a ban on U.S. funding for organizations that promote forced abortions or sterilizations.

The legislation, supported by Catholic and other pro-life leaders, keeps intact U.S. policy that has been in place since 1985.

The House vote was to approve the Smith-Oberstar-Hyde amendment to the State Department reauthorization bill. The amendment removed language from the bill that could have released \$50 million to the U.N. Population Fund, known by the acronym UNFPA, despite evidence of its support of a coercive Chinese population control program.

Meanwhile, a bill was reintroduced in the Senate that would protect doctors and other health-care providers, as well as the institutions for which they work, who refrain from participating in abortions as a matter of conscience.

The Abortion Non-Discrimination Act was introduced by senators on both sides of the aisle.

Gail Quinn, executive director of the U.S. bishops' Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, hailed the bill's introduction in a July 14 statement.

"This modest bill protects health care providers who choose not to get involved in the destruction of innocent human life," Quinn said. "We are encouraged by (the bill's) bipartisan support and hopeful that Congress will act swiftly to pass this bill."

Finnerty leaves diocesan position

Patricia Finnerty, the first diocesan director of vocations awareness, is leaving the position she has held since April 1999.

Finnerty's last day with the diocese will be July 25. She will teach English and religion at Bishop Kearney High School beginning this fall.

"It's continuing my ministry in a different way. I'm very excited about the new challenge," said Finnerty, 41.

In her diocesan role Finnerty strove to develop vocations-awareness teams not only at the diocesan level, but also within several parishes. Another success during her four-

plus years was the annual 24 Hours With the Lord program — held each June in conjunction with priestly ordinations — which consistently drew scores of young men to learn more about vocations.

"I've enjoyed my time very much. We've got a lot of good initiatives started," Finnerty said.

"She brought to the office a really more open approach to promotion and awareness, especially from a professional background," said Father John DeSocio, who formerly coordinated diocesan efforts in priestly formation and worked closely with Finnerty.

"She really connected with the lo-

cal media; she just brought a great professionalism to our whole office and widened our vision," Father DeSocio added, citing Finnerty's efforts to develop a high-quality Web site for vocations awareness.

"Obviously the work she's pioneered has been very successful," said Father Joseph Hart, a diocesan vicar general and moderator of the Pastoral Center. "It's energized our vocations process and because of that we will miss her, but we wish her well in her new role."

Father Hart added that the diocese plans to seek a replacement for Finnerty.

— Mike Latona

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