

Veterans initiate prayers for peace

Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier

ELMIRA — Despite dreary skies and the threat of rain, a crowd of approximately 40 people gathered in Wisner Park at twilight on Nov. 5 to pray for loved ones serving abroad in the armed forces. Even as a slight drizzle turned to a steady rain, the people remained, huddled under umbrellas as they sang and prayed for peace.

Father Rick Farrell of St. Mary's Parish in Elmira and the Rev. Bill Vallet of Pennsylvania Avenue United Methodist Church led the prayer service, which was organized by Vietnam Veteran's Affairs Chapter 803 of Elmira. After welcoming those gathered, Michael Lehmann, a state veterans counselor and chaplain of VVA Chapter 803, introduced his son, Michael Lehmann II, who leaves for the Navy on Nov. 24.

The 18-year-old took out his acoustic guitar and played "I Can Only Imagine" as he sang the lyrics. The song, by Christian band Mercy Me, ponders what it will be like to stand in the presence of Jesus.

"We're here to support the families of our troops. The best thing that we can do is to pray for them," Lehmann said once his son's song was finished.

The prayer service was not meant to be for or against war or political in any way, Lehmann said. He emphasized that the prayer service was just people coming together to pray for the safety of U.S. soldiers abroad and to pray for peace.

Father Farrell urged those present to imitate St. Francis of Assisi and ask God to make them into channels through which peace could flow. As those present lifted their voices in song to sing the saint's prayer, several others walked across the street to join the group.

"Let us pray for our brothers and sisters as they serve with courage and determination," Father Farrell said, leading the prayer for not only those serving in the military, but also for their families and friends, political leaders, and the preservation of all human rights. Toward the end of the prayer, people were given the

opportunity to call out the names of those overseas, so that the group could pray for them by name.

After praying the Our Father and exchanging the sign of peace, Rev. Vallet offered a final blessing, and the prayer service concluded as the group sang "Let There Be Peace on Earth."

Desiré Moore attended the prayer service with her mother-in-law, Mary Moore, and a family friend, Donna Sams. Duane Moore, Desiré's husband of one month, is serving in Germany but is scheduled to go to Iraq within the month. Desiré, who is a member of the Army Reserve, was grateful for the chance to attend the prayer service, which she said brought people together for support.

"You have good days and bad, and it makes you feel like you're not alone to get out and talk," said Mary Moore.

The elder Lehmann was pleased with the prayer service and its turnout.

"It was fantastic. We started this about six or eight months ago with just three, four or five people, and now we have a good crowd. It was really good, and it's going to get bigger," he said.

He mentioned that many of his fellow veterans have children serving overseas, so they can personally identify with concerned families and friends of loved ones serving abroad.

"It's a matter of pride in this country for our servicepeople. As far as I'm concerned, we can do nothing as long as they're there but support them 100 percent," said Danny Wolfe, president of VVA Chapter 803, voicing the sentiment of the chapter members present.

"We're going to support the troops until they all come home and put their foot on our American soil," said fellow VVA Chapter 803 member James Clark.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The prayer service is held the first Wednesday of every month. December's service will be held at 5:30 p.m. at Pennsylvania Avenue United Methodist Church.



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

Mike Lehmann II (left) plays guitar at the beginning of a Nov. 5 ecumenical prayer service in Elmira's Wisner Park. Participants gathered to pray for military personnel around the world and their families. As Jerome Mase (center) and Jim Clark listen to Lehmann play, Father Richard Farrell (background), pastor of St. Mary's Parish in Elmira, prepares to help lead the service.



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If you or someone you know released such a work this year, send us in writing by Nov. 17 the name(s) of the author(s)/performer(s), the name and brief description of the work and a contact number in case we have any questions.

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