

# **Bishop D'Arcy not opposed to 'peaceful' protests about commencement**

FORT WAYNE, Ind. – Bishop John M. D'Arcy of Fort Wayne-South Bend said he was not opposed to “peaceful” demonstrations against the University of Notre Dame’s invitation to President Barack Obama to speak at this year’s commencement.

His communications spokesman said in an e-mail to Catholic News Service April 20 that a statement the bishop issued on Good Friday urging Catholics not to participate in “unseemly and unhelpful demonstrations” was aimed at protests that “attack” President Obama, university president Holy Cross Father John I. Jenkins and/or the university.

The spokesman, Vince LaBarbera, director of the diocesan communications office, said the bishop does not want people participating in demonstrations organized by those who have vowed to make the controversy into “a circus.”

Critics of President Obama have said his support of legal abortion and embryonic stem-cell research make him an inappropriate choice to be a commencement speaker at a Catholic university. President Obama also will receive an honorary degree from Notre Dame.

In his April 10 statement, Bishop D'Arcy urged “all Catholics and others of good will to stay away from unseemly and unhelpful demonstrations against the nation’s president or Notre Dame” or Father Jenkins.

“The Notre Dame community is well-equipped to supervise and support discussions and prayer within their own campus,” he said.

In that statement he said he had had “a positive meeting” with Father Jenkins, and expected “further dialogue” would continue.

“These are days of prayer and hope when we should turn to the risen Christ for light

and wisdom," he said. "Let us all work toward a peaceful graduation experience for the class of 2009 at our beloved Notre Dame."

Bishop D'Arcy, in whose diocese Notre Dame is located, announced weeks ago he would boycott the graduation ceremony as his own silent protest of President Obama's abortion policies.

A dozen student groups have formed a campus coalition called Notre Dame Response to express their opposition to President Obama speaking at the commencement. On April 17 the coalition held a march for life with speakers and a rally.

The coalition has posted a message from Bishop D'Arcy on its Web site, [www.ndresponse.com](http://www.ndresponse.com), that said he was supportive of the coalition's efforts "or any other prayerful and dignified demonstrations by Notre Dame students."

Anti-abortion activist Randall Terry opened up an office in South Bend to launch a vigorous daily protest of the president's upcoming commencement address and said he wouldn't rule out having students disrupt the ceremony.

A representative of the university told CNS April 20 the school has not issued any new statements on the situation.

In March a Notre Dame spokesman told CNS that he had heard anecdotally that most students were pleased with this year's choice of President Obama as the commencement speaker and feel honored the first black U.S. president would accept Notre Dame's invitation from among the many he has received.