

Indiana bishop urges Catholics not to participate in Obama protests

WASHINGTON - Calling the protests against President Barack Obama's planned commencement speech at the University of Notre Dame "unseemly and unhelpful," Bishop John M. D'Arcy of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Ind., advised Catholics not to attend such demonstrations.

Bishop D'Arcy released a statement on Good Friday, a few weeks after announcing he was disappointed with the Catholic university for its invitation to President Obama to speak at the May 17 commencement and its decision to award him an honorary degree.

The bishop and other critics of President Obama have said his support of legal abortion and embryonic stem-cell research make him an inappropriate choice to be commencement speaker at a Catholic university.

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

"I urge all Catholics and others of good will to stay away from unseemly and unhelpful demonstrations against our nation's president or Notre Dame or (Holy Cross) Father John I. Jenkins," president of the university, he said in the April 10 statement. "The Notre Dame community is well-equipped to supervise and support discussions and prayer within their own campus."

"I had a positive meeting this week with Father Jenkins, and I expect further dialogue will continue," Bishop D'Arcy continued.

"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."

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.

In their criticism of Notre Dame's decision, announced March 20, several U.S. bishops referred to their 2004 document, "Catholics in Political Life," which states in part that "the Catholic community and Catholic institutions should not honor those who act in defiance of our fundamental moral principles. They should not be given awards, honors or platforms which would suggest support for their actions."