

Priest among six arrested at Pennsylvania pipeline construction site

WASHINGTON —A priest arrested for protesting a natural gas pipeline being built through land owned by the Adorers of the Blood of Christ in Pennsylvania said he acted because he agreed with the sisters that the project is desecrating the earth.

“We just want to support them and symbolically stop the pipeline and put our lives on the side of justice,” Father Bill Pickard, 70, a retired priest of the Diocese of Scranton, Pennsylvania, said Oct. 23, two days after the protest.

Father Pickard was one of six people arrested and charged with defiant trespass during the second nonviolent protest in a week at the sisters’ property in Columbia, Pennsylvania, southeast of Harrisburg. They were arrested after stretching a quilt across the entrance of the construction site.

Planned by the grass-roots group Lancaster Against Pipelines, the protests were designed to slow if not stop construction on a leg of the 183-mile Atlantic Sunrise pipeline being built by Tulsa, Oklahoma-based Williams Partners to carry gas from the Marcellus Shale in northeastern Pennsylvania.

The Adorers have resisted the pipeline routed through farmland the order leases since it was proposed, but have not endorsed the protest because of their lawsuit challenging the project on religious freedom grounds.

“We don’t have any other option to stop this. Civil disobedience is a powerful spiritual tool,” Father Pickard, who recently joined the Catholic Worker community at Mary House in New York City, told Catholic News Service.

Four other Catholic Workers and a Mennonite minister were among those arrested.

“We’re pleased to notice how people outside the immediate county are starting to weigh in on this issue and are making great efforts to support us,” said Ann

Neumann, spokeswoman for the anti-pipeline group.

Chris Stockman, a Williams spokesman, has maintained that while the company respects the peoples' right to protest, it wants to complete the project "in a safe, efficient manner."

The first protest Oct. 17 saw 23 people arrested, charged with defiant trespass and summoned to appear in court later.

Lancaster Against Pipelines received permission from the Adorers to build a small chapel on the property, adjacent to the pipeline route. The site has become a gathering place for prayer and community meetings related to the project.

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