

Protesters charged with felony for disrupting Easter Mass

CHICAGO - Six young people - all between the ages of 18 and 25 -were charged with felony criminal defacement of property and simple battery after spattering fake blood on themselves and nearby worshippers during the 11 a.m. Easter Mass in the auditorium at Holy Name Cathedral's parish center in Chicago March 23.

Easter Masses, the Easter Vigil and all Holy Week services were celebrated in the auditorium and other nearby locations because the cathedral has been closed for repairs since Feb. 26.

On March 24 a Cook County judge set a minimum of \$25,000 for bail for each protester, according to the Chicago Tribune, which also reported that if they are found guilty the six could be sentenced to up to five years in prison.

The three men and three women, calling themselves "Catholic Schoolgirls Against the War," yelled slogans in support of ending the war in Iraq before they were removed by security guards and handcuffed by police.

The disruption came shortly after Cardinal Francis E. George of Chicago started his homily, when the six moved from their seats into the aisle and yelled statements decrying the deaths of 4,000 U.S. service members in Iraq and untold thousands of Iraqi citizens.

They then shouted that to demonstrate opposition to the war Cardinal George should not have met earlier this year with Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley and President George W. Bush, whom they called "the chief architect" of the war. On Jan. 7 the cardinal, President Bush and the mayor met while the president was in Chicago to mark the anniversary of the passage of the federal program No Child Left Behind.

As the protesters were removed from the auditorium, they shouted, "Even the pope calls for peace," according to parishioners. Cardinal George responded, "And so should we all call for peace," and he continued his homily.

After the Mass, Cardinal George told reporters, "We should all work for peace, but not by interrupting the worship of God. It's an act of violence to come among a group of believers and try to manipulate worship to your own purposes, no matter how noble and good they are."

Both the Vatican and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, which Cardinal George heads as president, have opposed the Iraq War since it began.

The six people arrested and charged are: Donte D. Smith, 18, of Chicago; Ephran Ramirez Jr., 22, of Chicago; Ryne Ziemba, 25, of Chicago; Mercedes Phinaih, 18, of Bloomington; Regan Maher, 25, of Chicago; and Angela Haban, 20, of Prospect Heights.

Smith's bail was set at \$35,000 because he has a criminal record; he served time in a federal prison for trespassing at a military installation, according to prosecutors.

The Tribune reported that the six protesters were charged with a felony because they damaged property owned by a religious organization and it will cost the church about \$3,000 for new carpeting and new chairs.