

Two priests, Baltimore woman among five indicted for role in anti-nuclear protest

WASHINGTON - Five people, including two priests and a sister, have been indicted on federal charges 10 months after an All Souls' Day demonstration at a U.S. Navy nuclear weapons storage depot in Bangor, Wash.

In indictments unsealed Sept. 3, a federal grand jury in Tacoma, Wash., charged Jesuit Father Bill Bichsel, 82; Jesuit Father Stephen Kelly, 61; Sacred Heart Sister Anne Montgomery, 83; Susan Crane, 65; and Lynne Greenwald, 61, with conspiracy, trespass, destruction of property on a naval installation and depredation of government property.

Calling themselves the Disarm Now Plowshares, group members defended their actions as a requirement of their Catholic faith and as necessary under international law.

The five are accused of using bolt cutters to cut holes in three chain-link fences to enter the Naval Base Kitsap's Bangor complex, 20 miles west of Seattle. The base is the West Coast home of the Trident nuclear-armed submarine and the Strategic Weapons Facility, Pacific where more than 2,300 nuclear warheads are stored.

The government said the five posed a danger to national security.

"All citizens are free to disagree with their government. But they are not free to destroy property or risk the safety of others," said U.S. Attorney Jenny A. Durkan in a statement announcing the indictments.

"These defendants quite literally crossed the line and must be held accountable," Durkan said.

Once inside, the five left a trail of blood, hammered on a roadway and fences, scattered sunflower seeds and unfurled a banner that read: "Disarm Now

Plowshares, Trident: Illegal + Immoral.”

While praying, military personnel intervened and held the five facedown for more than three hours and then took them away for several hours of questioning. The five said they were given letters banning them from the base and released.

The indictments were announced as the Plowshares movement observes its 30th anniversary. The first Plowshares action took place Sept. 9, 1980 at a General Electric factory in King of Prussia, Pa., when eight people entered the facility and hammered and poured blood on the nose cone of a nuclear warhead. More than 100 such actions have taken place worldwide during the last three decades.

The indictments came as no surprise to the peace activists, all of whom have been arrested, charged and jailed for their involvement in nonviolent protests at weapons facilities in the past.

“I have been involved since 1980 in Plowshares movements, which are really saying we as human beings, as Christians, as citizens of a country which is supposed to be governed by its citizens, we are responsible to eliminate these weapons,” said Sister Anne, who participated in the King of Prussia demonstration and lives in Redwood City, Calif.

Crane, a member of the Jonah House community in Baltimore, said she believed the warheads stored at the base pose a grave danger.

“My faith tells me we’re supposed to love our enemies,” she told Catholic News Service. “That means we don’t shoot radioactive garbage at them. We don’t threaten with nuclear weapons. We don’t take money that should be used for the poor like those here in Baltimore and spend it on weapons.”

Father Bichsel, who lives at the Tacoma Catholic Worker, said the group prayed and discussed the action for about a year.

“I acted based on my own belief in the power of Resurrection,” he said. “This power of hope, this power of life that comes from that is much more powerful than the threat of death.”

All five are scheduled to be arraigned in U.S. District Court in Tacoma Sept. 24. Each could face up to 10 years in prison and fines up to \$250,000.