

Omaha octogenarian priest gets probation for protest

Joshua J. McElwee | Apr. 13, 2011



Fr. Jack McCaslin (NCR photos/Joshua J. McElwee)

Fr. Jack McCaslin, an Omaha, Neb., diocesan priest known for his opposition to nuclear weapons, was sentenced to three years probation April 12 for an act of civil disobedience at Offutt Air Force Base, the home of the command center responsible for the planning and targeting of the nation's nuclear arsenal.

The sentence, which was decided in U.S District Court by Judge Thomas D. Thalken, also imposes a \$300 fine. McCaslin plead guilty before sentencing to charges of trespassing for the Aug. 6, 2010, action, at which he walked about 10 steps onto the property of the base with three others.

McCaslin told *NCR* by phone that he was "altogether pleased" with the sentence.

While the 82-year-old priest said he doesn't "like to pay a fine because I don't know where it goes and what they do with it," he also acknowledged he wasn't "well enough" to go to jail.

McCaslin has been in and out of hospitals over the past several months for an unknown mass in his lungs. Supporters had expressed worry in e-mails before the sentencing that any jail time for the priest could amount to a "death sentence."

Before announcing the sentence, Thalken told McCaslin that he was in a position of luxury as priest because he has a "pulpit for spreading his message," said Jerry Ebner, who attended the trial.

Although McCaslin said he has "a good, happy relationship" with Thalken after landing in his courtroom several times over four decades of civil resistance to the military installation, he also said he wanted to tell the judge that the "pulpit at Offutt Air Force Base is a lot bigger than the pulpit at any church."

Ebner, who is a member of the Omaha Catholic Worker community, said about 15 of McCaslin's supporters attended the trial.

Asked how probation would affect his future plans, McCaslin said while he's broken conditions set by judges for release in the past in order to continue protesting, he would probably "stick to it" this time because his "energy level is not what it used to be."

Mark Kenney, a former member of the U.S. Navy who was one of those arrested with McCaslin, was sentenced to six months in prison Feb. 25. He is expected to report to the Federal Prison Camp in Duluth, Minn., April 27 to begin serving his sentence.

Read more about McCaslin: [Behind peace witness, a prophetic, transforming priest](#) [1]

[Joshua J. McElwee is an NCR staff writer. His e-mail address is jmcelwee@ncronline.org.]

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