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Longtime peace activist says her health is on the decline

Patrick O'Neill | Mar. 2, 2012

In an email to friends, longtime peace activist Sacred Heart Sr. Anne Montgomery said her physical health is deteriorating and that she would no longer be able to tolerate the chemotherapy treatments she has been receiving.

The chemo "seemed to be helping," Montgomery wrote in her email Friday, "but last weekend I had breathing problems and tests showed a lung full of fluid and that continuing any chemo, etc. would not help."

Montgomery, who has spent years in jail and prison for acts of nonviolent civil disobedience, mostly against nuclear weapons, joined Josephite Fr. Philip Berrigan, his brother, Jesuit Fr. Daniel Berrigan, and five others for the first Plowshares action Sept. 9, 1980, when the eight activists (the Plowshares 8) entered a General Electric weapons plant in King of Prussia, Pa., and used carpenter's hammers to disarm two nose cones on a Mark 12A nuclear warhead.

In 2011, Montgomery received a two-month federal prison sentence for her role with members of Disarm Now Plowshares, who entered a weapons facility in Washington state Nov. 2, 2009.

"I am trying to reach many friends, so please excuse this communication by e-mail and apologize to anyone you know whom I have missed," Montgomery wrote. "I have been blessed by so much support, personal and medical, that I know I must share that in some way with all those across our world who lack so much and are near desperation, especially for their children. I also know that the Spirit prays at the heart of the universe and that creation is an ongoing journey of death and resurrection, however mysterious that process is. Because it is energized by Love, we can enter into it rather than count on our own weak efforts and vulnerabilities and worry about failures. When I made my final vows, our group was named, 'Joy in the Faith,' I am coming to believe that must somehow be possible since it is promised in the Beatitudes and that those who have nothing show us the way."

A longtime volunteer with Christian Peacemaker Teams, Montgomery received the 2011 Peace Award of the War Resisters League.

Christian Peacemakers has sent delegations to many war-torn areas, including Haiti, Iraq and the West Bank. Montgomery has spent much of the last seven years with other Christian Peacemakers in Hebron, a war-torn city in the West Bank, said David McReynolds, who presented the League's award to Montgomery.

At the award ceremony, Montgomery's longtime friend Elizabeth McAlister praised her spunk, her discipline and her commitment. McAlister is a fellow peace activist who was jailed with Montgomery in West Virginia in the 1980s after the two participated in demonstrations against the U.S. military.

Reflecting on those days in prison, McAlister said:

"One night, Anne knocked on my door to share the news she'd just heard on her radio: that the United States had

bombed Libyan President Moammar Gadhafi's home and killed one of his children. We shared the shock and grief of that moment and, in our own fashion, we prayed. Prison is a hard place to hear such news; one feels so helpless. Praying with Anne made it bearable. Being with Anne made it bearable. And if I had had eyes to see, her present commitment to Hebron might have been visible at that moment."

In the conclusion to her email, Montgomery wrote: "I am constantly filled with gratitude to you all who have done the nitty-gritty work of peace and nonviolent action and invited me to join you. I hope to be able to do so in a new way. As Phil Berrigan said in his last letter, that work must come from our own vulnerability. Much love, Anne".

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