

Headed to jail, peace activist explains witness

Joshua J. McElwee | Jul. 18, 2012 NCR Today

Last night, Mark Kenney hopped a bus heading from his home in Omaha, Nebraska to Minnesota.

Once he arrives, he says he'll walk from the station to his destination: the Federal Prison Camp in Duluth. There, he'll voluntarily report and be taken into custody, which he won't leave for the next four months.



Kenney, a Catholic peace activist, starts today a four-month sentence for an April action in which he and two others were arrested for peacefully protesting the U.S. military's use of unarmed drone aircraft in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The action is just the latest for Kenney, who has also served extended stints in prison for nonviolent witnesses against the country's nuclear weapons complex. Last year, [he served six months at Duluth for a 2010](#) [1] witness in which he and others walked ten steps onto Omaha's Offutt Air Force Base, the home of U.S. Strategic Command and responsible for the planning and targeting of the nation's nuclear weapons.

As he was preparing for the bus ride north on Monday, Kenney told *NCR* that he was most worried about his family's financial situation this time, as his months in prison will keep him from holding the odd blue-collar jobs he works. He said he and his wife had been selling what they could to start saving money.

Kenney also said he wants people to know that his action was "faith-based" and not only political.

"The big thing is it's not a political action for me," he said. "It never has been. It's a faith based action, especially with what's going on now. I think the church has forgotten how much resistance there is to society at large if you're really going to profess your faith in the world."

While Kenney pleaded guilty to trespassing in June for the April action, which saw he and two others walk a few steps onto the property of Whiteman Air Force Base outside Kansas City, Mo., before being met by police in riot gear, the two others, Kansas City activist Ron Faust and Brian Terrell, a co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, are set to go to trial for the action in September.

Before heading out Tuesday, Kenney also penned an email about the reasons for his witness. Focusing on the

church's teaching regarding just war theory, the peace activist said the email had "just some thoughts tolling around in my head and heart I am attempting to put down on paper after many years of reflection and action."

Following is that email, unedited.

A Catholic's thoughts on war in our time

First and foremost, the just war theory comes from the one Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, I get that. The dialogue and formation of conscience regarding its implementation should be first and foremost happening from within the structures of the church.

Legitimate authority is required as one step of the many steps required to engage in a war scenario. Legitimate, secular authority should not get to usurp or dominate the dialogue or debate in the development of moral conscience on whether wars are just or not. In other words, secular authority doesn't get a free pass to determine, on its own initiative, how a Catholic should, or shouldn't, respond to secular, all too worldly, interpretations of the just war theory.

The Catechism of the Catholic church [states in paragraph 2307 that](#) [2] "because of the evils and injustices that accompany all war, the church urges everyone to prayer and action so the divine Goodness may free us from **the ancient bondage of War.**" (Emphasis mine)

It is reprehensible that Catholics join in with any kind of patriotic pride and din, in lockstep with the secular fervor that is required to be built up to get folks to commit to the activity of war.

We should be distancing ourselves from the bands and parades, the air shows and the flag waving that accompanies all build up to war. These are the secular props used to get those uniformed in their faith in line with the worldly powers that be. Our discernment about any war activity belongs within the dialogue and prayer life and sacraments of our Catholic faith formation.

Pope John Paul II made this point eminently clear to the Bush administration as it was ramping up its secular interpretation of the just war theory, when they were building up to the invasion of Iraq.

The Bush administration pushed hard for the Holy Father's blessing, but didn't get it. The Holy Father made it clear that Catholics would have to consider very seriously these matters and act as their own consciences dictate.

The Vicar or Christ is the apostolic successor of 2000 years of vicars of Christ on earth. He is part of the apostolic succession that developed the just war theory. He has access to the stored knowledge of centuries of historical tradition in the use of the just war theory.

I am not denying the right of legitimate secular authority to make their case to their constituents. What I do insist upon is that we, as Catholics, give more credence to the Holy Father's interpretation and the church's application of the just war theory, through its teaching authority, than to those making the case from a more secular, and many times more short sighted, nationalistic agenda.

Sadly, I don't see this faith based discernment happening in our church, especially the church in America. It seems to me that many of us see the pope, whoever he may be at the time, as just some doddering, old, out of touch, other worldly guy, who has to, and is expected to say, peace, not war.

Then, we turn right around and follow the secular usurpers of a great Catholic tradition (the just war theory)

down the same old worn out path to Hell and bondage that has dominated our world from the inception of the just war theory.

For all these reasons, I absolutely renounce the just war theory as it has been spun, by secular interests outside of the church's historical and spiritual perspective.

The Catholic church acknowledges that war exists because of our sins (Catechism, paragraph 2317), and rightfully so.

We, as a church, have the sacraments and teachings of the church, the teachings of Christ, and the Cross, to help us deal with and overcome our sin. I renounce the secularly embedded idea that because wars have always been, they will always be. Even the Prophets of the Old Testament refused to believe this, (Isaiah 2:4).

In the catechism, the church places the prophetic utterances of Isaiah within the same paragraph of why we have had wars. So, someday in the future, be it near or far, the just war theory will and must become obsolete.

To deny that this will never be possible and that we will always have to utilize our just war theory, is to deny that someday, every knee will bow down and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

It denies the very prayer that we pray in the Our Father: "Thy Kingdom Come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." It denies that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. It relegates to us forever that the Divine will desire His people to be held forever in the grips of the **?ancient bondage of war.?** (Again, emphasis mine).

For all these reasons, I believe it is absolutely imperative that we acknowledge and witness to the belief in the prophetic promises of peace. I also believe it is absolutely imperative that we acknowledge those who witness to the renunciation of war as an acceptable means to peace as it is practiced in our modern times.

Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI are modern day examples of this witness. I believe these two prophetic voices, coming from their brutal experiences growing up in a period of great war and strife in their own homelands gives even greater credence to their prophetic voices, in pursuit of peace.

I believe, as the Catholic church continues throughout history in its mission to bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ war will, and must someday cease. Or in the words of Pope John Paul II; "No more War, Never again." War.? I believe that the further we get along this timeline of salvation history, more and more witnesses to living the prophetic promise of peace will, and must, emerge.

Because the church has been granted the authority of ?binding and loosing?, I respect and concede to the historically based reasons we rely on it for guidance. I look forward to, and witness to, the day when the Church will be able to loose us from even these strict limitations to our faith-based, involvement in **?the ancient bondage of war.?**

In Christ's Peace and Solidarity,

Mark Kenney

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[1] <http://ncronline.org/node/24318>

[2] <http://old.usccb.org/catechism/text/pt3sect2chpt2art5.shtml/>