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Anti-nuclear activist released pending trial

by Patrick O'Neill

Saying his Duluth, Minn., community would likely benefit from his return to work, a federal magistrate judge granted pretrial release without bond to Transform Now Plowshares defendant and Catholic Worker Greg Boertje-Obed.

In a hearing Sept. 11 in U.S. District Court in Knoxville, Tenn., Judge C. Clifford Shirley denied a U.S. attorney's request to keep Boertje-Obed in jail as he awaits his Feb. 26, 2013 trial for breaking into the Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge, TN as part of a July 28 anti-nuclear weapon protest.

In denying the state attorney's request, Shirley said Boertje-Obed's record of appearing for court is good -- by his own word, one hundred percent.

Shirley also disagreed with the prosecutor's contention that Boertje-Obed posed a danger to the community.

"He poses little danger," Shirley said. "In fact, it may be that some people in Duluth will benefit if he returns to his normal activities.

"...Taking in the totality of factors, Mr. Obed appears to be an appropriate case to release."

In Duluth, Boertje-Obed works with the poor. He is married and has an adult daughter.

Shirley, who will not be the trial judge in the plowshares case, but has been the sitting judge for other misdemeanor cases stemming from protests at Y-12, also said:

"In my experience in these kinds of cases, and I've had several ... these protesters actually want to attend trial. Candidly, I don't think I could keep them from it. Part of the express purpose of their action is to

publicize the production of nuclear weapons, and they view their arrest and trial as part of the publicity. So right or wrong, he's likely to appear.?

Boertje-Obed was released from Blount County Detention Center on Tuesday. He had been held there since his July 28 arrest. The two others involved in his action were released Aug. 3.

The case, involving a major security breach at a top U.S. nuclear facility by three unarmed pacifists, has received wide media coverage.

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The trio, Boertje-Obed, 57, Michael Walli, 63, of Washington D.C. and Society of the Holy Child Jesus and New York City native Sr. Megan Rice, 82, are charged with two federal felonies and a misdemeanor trespass charge stemming from their Y-12 arrest.

The actions of the three, who carried blood, roses and bread with them onto the Y-12 grounds, resulted in a two-week shutdown of the Oak Ridge facility to evaluate security procedures.

The three cut through several fences to gain access to the Oak Ridge site. They made it to the outer walls of one building where highly enriched uranium is stored. They hammered and poured blood on the lab's Highly Enriched Uranium Materials Facility.

In a telephone interview with *NCR* Wednesday morning as he prepared to board a bus to return to Duluth, Boertje-Obed said he was grateful for the judge's comments.

"I'm happy that he understood where I was coming from," Boertje-Obed said. "I'm glad that he came around to seeing that I was telling the truth."

Regarding his action July 28, Boertje-Obed said: "I feel it was like a miraculous event in many ways that it ever happened because there were so many obstacles to overcome. It only happened because God was with us."

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