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Anti-war activist found guilty of trespassing on Marquette campus

Marie Rohde | Jul. 16, 2013
Milwaukee

Longtime anti-war activist Bob Graf said he is willing to go to jail to make the point that his friends at Marquette University need to teach peace, not war.

Before summer is over, he may do just that. A member of Breaking the Silence, an anti-war group that regularly protests on campus, Graf was arrested for trespassing earlier this year and found guilty Monday.

"What's the worst thing that could happen?" he said in an interview. "They could send me to jail for praying on campus."

Members of Breaking the Silence say Graf's arrest is the result of protests of the university's support of the school's ROTC program. Marquette says it is the result of other disruptive behavior.

Marquette is one of two Catholic universities in the country to have ROTC classes for all three branches of the military on campus. (The other is the University of Notre Dame in Indiana.) Students at "partner schools," some of which are larger universities, in five counties attend Marquette for the military classes.

"The military officer training bases on campus are the choice of Marquette University despite the fact that they teach reflexive killing -- killing without conscience -- and that the military values are a priority over conscience," Graf said.

Across the country, particularly in the Ivy League, colleges and universities have balked at having ROTC on campus. But if schools get federal money, they have to allow ROTC programs. What many schools have done is offer the program but not the classes, partnering with schools like Marquette.

"It's all about money," Graf said. "I can't get any records on how much the ROTC program brings in, but it's all about money."

Marquette spokesman Andrew Brodzeller declined to say how much income the program generates for Marquette or how many students participate in the programs on its campus.

Graf acknowledged that for some students, an ROTC scholarship is the only way to get a college education. "We hope they will learn to be soldiers of conscience," said Graf, who once studied for seven years to be a Jesuit priest.

Graf and a band of 30 or so activists have been protesting on campus for years, but their efforts stepped up around 2009. Their message? "Marquette teaches killing," Graf said. "We want Marquette to be faithful to the Gospel."

Graf was arrested for trespassing on the campus March 13, the day Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected Pope Francis. He said he arrived at about 2:30 p.m. to do some research at the library on pacifist Dorothy Day,

one of the founders of the Catholic Worker movement. The library houses her papers and that of the Catholic Workers.

Although he had been served with a letter to stay off campus, Graf said he didn't think he would be arrested for going to the library before joining others to protest later in the afternoon. He then wanted to go to Church of the Gesu, a Jesuit parish on campus, to pray for the pope.

Graf didn't make it past the library's front desk before campus security guards arrived.

In court, Graf said one of the security officers told him he would not be arrested if he left quietly, though neither of the two officers who testified said they told him that. After Graf left the library, city officers arrested Graf as he walked to his car.

Although the police arrest report cites Graf's anti-war activities and states that the university tolerated the protests until recently, a university spokesman said the decision to ban Graf from the campus had nothing to do with those activities.

"It could have been any one of us," fellow protester Joe Radoszewski said. "They threatened to have us arrested many times, but we stood our ground and refused to move."

Why single out Graf? "They're trying to make an example of Bob," Radoszewski said. "They think that if they remove the catalyst, we'll all go away."

Not so, Brodzeller wrote in an email: "Bob tried to force his way into a private meeting and he refused to follow the instructions of Marquette's Department of Public Safety, and obstructed student traffic on campus."

Brodzeller declined to elaborate.

Graf said he believes the incident Brodzeller cited occurred last fall. A discussion of Jim Forest's biography of Dorothy Day, *All Is Grace*, was being held at the university's Center for Peacemaking. Graf said he was invited to the event, but when he showed up, the center's director, Patrick Kennelly, told him the university banned him from campus. Kennelly did not return a phone call from a reporter.

Graf was cited for trespassing in October, apparently related to this incident, but the charges were dismissed in municipal court.

On Monday, Judge Derek C. Mosley, who said he agreed with Graf's reasons for protesting, gave Graf wide berth to explain his case but ultimately found it was irrelevant: Marquette had banned him from campus and didn't have to explain why. He found Graf guilty and ordered him to pay a $171 fine within 90 days*.

Graf said he would prefer to be jailed for four days at the Milwaukee County House of Correction. If found guilty of a municipal violation, one can be jailed one day for every $50 of a fine for willfully refusing to pay the fine.

"I guess I'm blessed to be selected as the scapegoat," Graf said in court.

Jail is not unfamiliar to Graf, who served a year in a high-security prison for anti-war activities during the Vietnam War era. He was one of the Milwaukee 14, a group that broke into the downtown draft center in 1968, gathered the records of the men about to be called up for duty and took them outside to burn them with homemade napalm. A jury convicted Graf, who had been a Jesuit seminarian until months before, of burglary, arson and theft, and he was sent to prison.

Graf left the Jesuit order after getting into hot water over another protest in 1968. The African-American students had resigned from Marquette, charging the school with institutional racism. Graf, who was living on campus as part of the Jesuit community at the time, stood with the students during their protests. He was arrested in the student union and put in jail. Graf said the superior of Marquette Jesuit community at the time ordered him under "orders of holy obedience" not to talk with African-American students until all the students returned to the university. They shortly did return, and Graf left the religious order that summer.

"The students all went back (to class)," said Graf, adding that university officials took the concerns raised by the students seriously. "I have to give Marquette credit on that. They changed."

In court Monday, the judge and the prosecutor, both African-American graduates of Marquette, said they benefited from the protest that became the impetus for the formation of the Education Opportunity Program, an effort to help low-income, first-generation students succeed in college.

Graf and his supporters say they have been nonviolent in following the dictates of their faith. "What Marquette is doing with its ROTC program is against every value they have taught me," he said. "Someone has to testify to what the Gospels teach us."

**An earlier version of this story gave an incorrect time frame for Graf to pay his fine.*

[Marie Rohde is a freelance journalist in Milwaukee.]

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