

← Back (/search?)

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'Sacred Inspectors' to speak in Lansing

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Daniel Sturm

Sisters Ardeth Platte, 66, and Carol Gilbert, 55, two of the three Michigan nuns who broke into a nuclear silo in Colorado in early October, will be in Lansing for a press conference June 6. They accepted the invitation of the Greater Lansing Network Against War and Injustice, which is hosting the event at Central United Methodist Church in downtown Lansing.

Platte and Gilbert and their accomplice, Jackie Hudson, 68, were arrested for breaking into a Minuteman III missile silo site near Greeley, Colo., Oct. 6. They poured their own blood onto the nuclear missile lid in the form of six crosses, hammered on the lid of the Minuteman-3 silo with a ball-ping hammer, and cut down three panels of fencing to open the site for public inspection.

They were held in the county jail until after their trial April 7, at which they were found guilty of trespassing and the malicious destruction of property. After nearly seven months of incarceration at the Clear Creek County Jail, on April 30 the sisters were set free on bond. They must return before Judge Robert Blackburn in the Denver Federal District Court for sentencing July 25, where the elderly nuns are likely to be sentenced to a prison term of more than six years.

Before their sentencing, the sisters want to say farewell to family members who may be dead by the time of their release, and to divest their clothing and other belongings to other people who can use them. They also want to take care of personal medical needs before sentencing and imprisonment, thank peace makers for their faithful support, and take time to retreat and pray for spiritual strength with their congregation of Sisters.

The sisters took part in anti-nuclear protests during the 1980s and early 1990s at Wurtsmith Air Force Base in Oscaba, Mich., and at Williams International, a company that makes parts for the bombs.

Platte, Gilbert and Hudson, who belong to the Order of Preachers (Dominicans) Congregation of the Sacred Hearts in Grand Rapids, have said they were compelled to act, as war with Iraq moved closer, and because the United States has never promised not to use its nuclear weapons. □The United States threat or use of any weapon of mass destruction is every bit as illegal and criminal as anyone else's,□ said East Lansing resident Annabel Dwyer, an adjunct professor in human rights and humanitarian law at Cooley Law School and a legal adviser in the case.

The Greeley silo is one of 49 nuclear missile sites. Each silo carries the explosive power of 300 kilotons, which is approximately 25 times the size of the Hiroshima bomb. The three sisters had argued that international law protects people who take action against a government with a murderous intent.

U.S. District Judge Robert Blackburn dismissed the sisters' arguments. The women were charged with interfering

with the nation's defense and causing property damage amounting to more than \$1,000.

Dwyer said the attorneys have filed motions asking Blackburn for an acquittal, a declaration of mistrial, or order a retrial. "The prosecutor has never presented proof that the nuns actually injured national defense material," Dwyer said. She said that cleaning blood from a missile silo and repairing fences amounted to much less than \$1,000.

Based on five eye-witness reports the attorneys also claim that a U.S. Marshal separated one juror from the rest of the jury while they were still deliberating. This misconduct would constitute grounds for a new trial, argue the sisters' attorneys.

The legal team's motions were turned down. Dwyer said they will now consider filing an appeal after the three are sentenced.

It will be in the conference room upstairs at the Central United Shalom Center for Justice and Peace at Central United Methodist Church, which is located at 215 N. Capitol Ave. in Lansing. The press conference will be 11 a.m. June 6.

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