

# end capital punishment "In God's name: Father Carl Kabat has spent a lifetime protesting nuclear weapons and doesn't plan to stop" Dec. 20 Greeley Trib.

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Greeley Tribune, Sunday, Dec.20, 2009 In God's name: Father Carl Kabat has spent a lifetime protesting nuclear weapons and doesn't plan to stop <http://www.greeleytribune.com/article/20091220/NEWS/912209981/1051&Pa...> Five months in Weld County Jail is starting to wear thin on Father Carl Kabat's normally patient and jovial demeanor. He misses the outdoors, the freedom to move around, which at 76 is getting harder to do anyway. With the potential for another several months under lock and key, the longtime Catholic priest and member of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate Order shrugs in his orange jail jumpsuit and smiles. He lives one day at a time. Whatever the price, Kabat stays strong in his resolve against an issue that was more prominent during the Cold War, but which has been pushed to the backburners of political and social discourse today — he wants these nuclear weapons, the Minuteman III missiles buried in the ground throughout the Midwest, gone. Some of those missiles are in northeast Weld County; he's spent a lifetime protesting those weapons and was promptly getting thrown in jail for it. He chuckles at the question: "Why?" "This is, 'You put your arse where your mouth is,'" jokes Kabat through a video screen at the Weld County Jail, where he has been affectionately nicknamed "The Podfather." "If someone has a better way to do it," then let him know, he muses. He'll flip from the silly to serious in a heartbeat: "How many people has N-8 killed even though it's never been used?" People who know Kabat know his latest protest in Weld probably won't be his last tangle with the criminal justice system. He's lived now almost 18 years of his life in jails and prisons for his cause, in which he enters missile silos throughout the Midwest, puts up his anti-nuke banners, hangs up his clown doll, does a little damage, and waits in prayer while authorities, usually from nearby Air Force bases, collect him for jail. It's almost a routine. Last August, he took his umpteenth trip to Colorado, driving from St. Louis with friends on the anniversary of the American bombing of Hiroshima in World War II, en route to the N-8 missile silo on Colo. 14, about eight miles west of New Raymer in northeastern Weld County. Just before the action, he sat calmly in the back seat of the car. Friend and fellow peace activist Chrissy Kirchhoefer, 32, of St. Louis, said he was as calm as she'd ever seen him before an "action." "Carl can get pretty anxious, especially about preparing for actions," Kirchhoefer said, adding that anxiety is more about a fear of the unknown. "I've never seen him more calm. He was so relaxed. It was beautiful. It was around 6-7 a.m., an amazing morning. The moon was setting, the sun was rising. It was gorgeous." He was promptly arrested, giving up the freedom and independence he values. He could die in his concrete cell — his three brothers and his father all died of heart problems. He could live to see another 20 years. "He's forewarned us the last couple of times he's gone in that he may die in prison," Kirchhoefer said. "It was interesting before he went in. Someone in the community asked him, 'Why do you like going to prison?' " "He said: 'I don't like it at all. If I'm not doing it, who else is?' He feels compelled certainly to (protest), and he feels a responsibility. He's spending time away from family and friends. I'd love to say, 'Carl, I'd love to have you here and it's really hard when you're away.' But he does feel compelled to do the right thing." Who is this guy? There's no anger in Father Carl, even while he's living in probably the angriest place in Weld County, playing by the rules of jail with no outside reading materials allowed and limitations on his freedom. His grandfatherly laugh seems to boom through the murky telephone line in the jail, as does his use of words like "crappin'" to describe the U.S. nuclear weapons policy or war. "It's hopefully making a statement, too, but it could be counterproductive," Kabat said of his zealotry about nuclear arms. "It gets people angry. Sorry about that." The former teacher, football coach and avid basketball fan now only has a little sister and her children's families in Illinois and Missouri. He also has his Catholic Worker house, the Carl Kabat House in St. Louis, where he dedicates himself to the service of the poor when he's not in jail. Coming out of the seminary when it was wise to keep his mouth shut, Kabat will do nothing of the sort today. He's always been a bit of scofflaw, his friends say, which is more about getting things done than waiting for permission to do it. He roams the earth as a free spirit, his concern for humanity at the forefront of his mind. "I kinda live from day to day," Kabat says. "One day my brother Paul and I, he was one year ahead of me in seminary. He acted strange. ... Finally, after supper he walks up to me and says, 'Happy birthday.' ... What's past is past. I've even forgotten my own birthday. Carpe diem." An avid reader, he is blind in one eye due to complications of a contact lens implant after losing vision from a cataract. "I figure I can see with my left eye, better than 20/20," Kabat says. "Now, doctors say my right eye has been ruined. I do well with my left." As you may think, he's a man of big principles. This Catholic priest has issues with church policies, with U.S. politics, with racism and sexism. He stands against capital punishment, he'll protest war and nuclear arms. He has let his convictions take him straight to jail and prison since his first protest in 1976, when he flew a banner with friends at an event prior to President Jimmy Carter's inauguration. But of all the time he's spent behind bars on behalf of his protests of the crimes against humanity, the blood he's spilled on the White House or the Pentagon, he has one big regret. In the early 1960s, he wished he would have marched with Martin Luther King. He wished he would have drunk from the "black" water fountain when he got off a train in New Orleans in 1952. "Like 57 years ago, when I got off the train ... and I saw a black water fountain and a white water fountain, I didn't do anything," he laments. These are the thoughts that keep a 76-year-old Catholic priest, mostly on the outs with the mainstream Catholic church, thinking, pondering, yet not worrying about what lies ahead. The Trial Father Carl Kabat's trial is scheduled Monday and Tuesday in Weld County Court. If convicted of the two misdemeanors crimes of criminal mischief and trespassing, he could be sentenced up to a year in jail as punishment (though he would get credit for the time already served). Carpe Diem Father Carl, born on the family farm in Scheller, Ill., one of five children, has been described as an idealistic young priest when he was ordained in 1959 in Illinois. He prefers not to look back, so readers will learn little about his formative years. As he is today, Kabat was revered in his circles in his early years, said his sister, 24 years his junior. "I grew up knowing him only as a priest," said his youngest

and only living sibling, MaryAnn Radake of Tamaroa, Ill., who was 4 when her brother was ordained. "He was a very caring and considerate person, along with being a jokester. ... When I was 7, he took me to Minnesota to the parishes he was ministering in at the time. I had a wonderful time traveling with him. It was a highlight of my young life." But his missionary experiences in the Philippines and Brazil in the mid- and late 1960s, where he witnessed children dying of starvation and governments loath to care, changed him. He came back to the United States just as haunted as many Vietnam soldiers had been at the time. "When he came back from Brazil and those people were starving, and my dad, who was a farmer, was being paid not to produce food, (Carl) didn't know why we were allowing people to starve, but at the same time willing to put guns and other things in their hands," said Radake, who agrees with her brother's anti-nuclear message. "He didn't understand the whole political thing, so the more he looked in, the more he tried to go mainstream, write letters, contact congressmen, the way everyone's told to do it." In 1976, he had gone to Baltimore to attend a Catholic World Peace Day, where more than 1,100 Catholic bishops were convening. He met up with the Berrigan brothers, who are considered by many to be the original nuclear protesters in this country. A group of them went to protest nuclear arms — which have always been condemned as a crime against humanity by the Catholic church — at an event prior to Carter's swearing-in. The banner said something like "No more Hiroshimas" or something like that," he recalls with what becomes a characteristic squeeze of the forehead, jogging his memory. "We were all found guilty by a kangaroo court," Kabat said. "I was sentenced to \$100 dollars and 30 days. A second judge said, 'Get them out of jail,' because we were found guilty of obstructing traffic, and we were standing on the grass. That was my first arrest." That first arrest in Plains, Ga., changed him, some say. "In my imagining of it, that's where Carl finds peace and purpose, peace for himself in his troubled heart," said Kelley Ryan, a Clayton, Mo., drama teacher who wrote the play, "And Carl Laughed" in 2007. "And it gives him a purpose on how to justify living in this country." His parents died while he was in jail; his three brothers also have passed in recent years. Through it all, Carl has tried to laugh, part of that living-for-the-moment thing. "I was in California when I was 73, and we were to determine what we wanted on our tombstone," Kabat recalls. "I (chose), 'He really lived.' No fancy bits, no this or that. I say do what you can do, sing and dance. Joyfulness is very, very important. Do what a person can do, then sing and dance." The message When he's not protesting nuclear arms or the death penalty, Kabat spends his time helping raise up those in poverty by rehabilitating houses through the Catholic worker movement and giving talks to different groups. He knows the masses may have forgotten about the threat that lies beneath them, buried underground encased in metal that could be set off by the slightest human error — one that could end it all. "When people hear the story and what it's about, they don't see it as crazy, they see it as, 'Wow, someone is doing something,'" said Bill Sulzman, a longtime friend of Kabat's from Colorado Springs. "This is an important question to be raised. In some cases, there is a disbelief the problem even exists." It's a fear that keeps Kabat going to prison or jail — where he traditionally refuses to post the minimal bonds for release. After four months in jail in Weld County this fall, Weld County Court Judge Dana Nichols reduced his \$5,000 bond to \$2,500. Kabat declined to pay the bond and decided to stay until his trial, which is scheduled to begin this week. Behind bars, Kabat can relax. He'll say, "I'm freer here than on the outside." There is nothing he can do behind bars. It's on the outside that he pushes himself to constant vigilance. "For many of us, Father Carl Kabat walks in the light of Jesus," said Frank Cordaro, a Catholic worker from Des Moines, Iowa. "If he were alive today, this is one way in which Jesus would be trying to reach the people of the United States. ... He's willing to put his own life on the line for what he believes, and this makes him a hero." Kabat's weapons protests have long been logged into the history books, being a part of the original Plowshares 8, a group that broke into the General Electric plant in King of Prussia, Penn., where they damaged two missile silo nose cones and poured their own blood on weapons plans, essentially spearheading the anti-nuclear movement. The word plowshares comes from the Bible verse, Isaiah 2:4 to "beat swords into plowshares." His exploits have landed him in many a newspaper article. He's been featured in the 1983 movie called "In the King of Prussia," which details that first Plowshares action and stars Martin Sheen as the judge. He's been featured in the book "Prophets Without Honor," by William Strabala of Denver. His decades of dissent were even dramatized by Kelley Ryan, the theater teacher at Clayton High School, who was inspired by newspaper accounts of his travails. Her student troupe in 2007 performed the play in Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland as a part of the American High School Theatre Festival. "Carl's message is very clear. Very specific," said Ryan, who remains at Clayton High, and uses Kabat's story as her own inspirational tool every day. "Having a nuclear arsenal is immoral and inhumane, and he'll tell you that message over and over and over again. The message of the play is that we have to know what our message is, and that it's about taking action in whatever way you can to better the world. Sometimes, the only way you can deal with a bad world is by taking action. That is what I think Carl does." Kabat saw that play after another stint in prison. He didn't applaud. He stormed the stage in tears to hug all the kids involved. Making a Difference Friends and family say Kabat inspires by his actions their own concerns of the calamity of nuclear weapons, war, weapons manufacturers or government takeover, whatever they feel strongly about. They act out in their own ways, but they say they cannot match Kabat's vigilance. Kirchhoefer protests the Boeing's Integrated Defense Systems, or "smart bomb" plant in St. Charles, Mo., and organizes an annual resistance gathering. Sulzman has focused his protests on the expansion of Fort Carson in Las Animas County but has protested nukes in his day, as well. Cordaro has done his own plowshare actions, even on B-52 bombers. Priests and nuns across the country do their own plowshare protests, which quietly make the many anti-nuclear movement Internet blogs but not the mainstream media. For the teens who acted out the life and struggles that define Father Carl, nuclear weapons evolved to an issue of modern day reality, their teacher said. "When we started this process, the kids were like nuclear weapons? Who cares? They're insurance," Ryan said, adding that nuclear testing in China in recent years challenged that nonchalance. Everyone involved in Kabat's life expects his trial to go as usual this week: A quick conviction, and an ignorance of international law, whereby the World Court in 1996 deemed nuclear weapons "generally contrary to international humanitarian law," and the Vatican Council's declaration in 1965 that nuclear weapons are a crime against humanity.

Judges have chastised Kabat in the past for sending the wrong message of committing crimes to protest a crime. He's a tenacious protester. "He's pacing himself," Kirchhoefer said of her elderly mentor and friend, whose vitality she says rivals her own parents. "I see him going back. I can't see him staying out, but at the same time, he really enjoys life and lives it fully when he is outside." Kabat has managed through the years to stay healthy, even as a smoker. But there is no escaping that ticking clock. "At some point, he'll be too physically and probably intellectually unable," said Sulzman, who met Kabat through visits with him at a federal prison in Florence. "We all run out of gas. I don't think he will voluntarily (stop) for personal reasons. I think he'll continue seeing this as his quest as long as it's physically possible. ... He's still doing this when most people have retired." And while Kabat feels the effects of age, which prohibit him from doing as much damage as he'd like to the silos he enters, he doesn't yet feel a call to stop. "Get rid of these damn things," Kabat said. "They're insane. It's our responsibility. ... If we make the decision to have the state murder people, that's not God's will, that's our will." There's no ego involved, however. While his friends say he walks in the light of Jesus and has a God-like presence, his convictions are personal. He's marching to his own orders. "I'm making a difference for Carl, it makes Carl feel good," he says. "I didn't do what I did on Aug. 6 for you or anyone else. I did it for Carl, to follow my own conscience. If it's helped, fine. Unless you know another way, do it. I did this, I've done that. If you know of some other way, then do it." \_\_\_\_\_ A lifetime of civil disobedience Father Carl Kabat was born in 1933 in Scheller, Ill. He was ordained a priest in 1959. He has been protesting nuclear weapons much of his adult life, and has spent almost 18 years behind bars for his cause. He has been in Weld County Jail since he was arrested Aug. 6 entering a missile silo facility in northeast Weld County. » 1961-65, he worked in parishes in Minnesota. » 1965-68, missionary work in the Philippines. » 1968-69, returned to Minnesota. » 1969-73, he served in Recife, Brazil, again doing missionary work with the poor. In 1973, he fled an arrest warrant in Brazil for inciting a revolution by conducting a church social. "He was preaching the kingdom of God starts here on Earth with human dignity," said his friend Chrissy Kirchhoefer. » 1973-77, he worked in Bemidji, Minn., on an Indian reservation with his brother, Paul Kabat. » 1976, was when he was arrested in Plains, Ga., for parading without a permit. He was addressing nuclear arms at Jimmy Carter's home. » 1977-80, lived in Baltimore, Md., at the Catholic Worker's Jonah House. He was arrested twice in 1978 for spilling blood at the Pentagon; sentenced to six-month terms in jail. » In 1979, he was arrested and jailed in Chicago for protesting the sale of weapons to Brazilian generals. » In 1979-80, he was arrested for pouring blood on the White House. » In 1980, he was arrested at the GE nuclear missile plant in King of Prussia, Penn., as a part of the original Plowshares 8. He served 14 months in prison while case was appealed. » 1983, he was arrested in west Germany, where he had been invited to be a part of a Plowshares movement there. He was released. » In 1984 at Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri, Carl and his brother Paul Kabat, and two others took a jackhammer powered by generator to a nuclear missile silo. For that, he and another got 18 years in prison. He was released on parole in 1991. » 1992-93, he was arrested for unlawful entry at a missile silo in Kansas City, Mo. » April 1, 1994, he went to a silo in North Dakota and was arrested for destruction of government property, conspiracy and intent to damage the national defense. Sentenced to five years in federal prison and served half of that. » 1996, he was arrested in Oklahoma City for violation of parole, and served balance of his sentence. Released in 1998. » August 2000, he enters the N-7 missile silo in northeastern Weld County wearing a clown suit. He and a friend are charged with entering a fenced military facility without permission, a federal misdemeanor. He was sentenced to time served, 83 days. He also violated probation in that case. » April 9, 2004, he again broke into a Weld County missile silo, charged with second-degree criminal trespassing and second-degree criminal tampering » June 20, 2006, he joined two others in entering the Minot Air Force Base in Garrison, N.C., where they hammered on and poured blood on the lid of an underground silo. In September, a jury found them guilty of destruction of government property. Sentenced to 15 months, and ordered to repay \$17,000 in restitution to the U.S. Air Force. » Aug. 6, 2009, he enters the N-8 missile silo in northeast Weld County. He has been charged with trespassing and criminal mischief. His trial is set this week. Source: "Prophets Without Honor," by William Strabala and Tribune archives.

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