

# Jesuit Priest Continues Holy Resistance to Nuclear Weapons

Will Spend Easter Sunday at FDC SeaTac

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***Father Steve Kelly, S.J.**, a Jesuit priest and longtime nuclear resister, arrived in Tacoma, Washington March 30th to appear in the US District Court on a warrant for a previous probation violation.*

Kelly had been arrested on a charge of trespassing at Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor in Silverdale, Washington during a [Pacific Life Community](#) nonviolent direct action in March 2017. Kelly refused to cooperate with a federal judge’s imposition of supervised release following his September 2017 trial, and an arrest warrant was issued. Kelly has consistently refused cooperation with any sentencing terms throughout his history of resistance.

After being taken in chains from Brunswick, Georgia, where he had been imprisoned for his part in the 2018 Kings Bay Plowshares, Kelly arrived in Tacoma, Washington on March 30, 2021, and was scheduled to have a preliminary court hearing before a Federal judge the next day on the outstanding warrant. Because of Kelly’s intention to appear in person at all court proceedings, he waived his appearance and was represented by his attorney, **Blake Kremer**. **Magistrate Judge David Christel** set another court hearing for April 13<sup>th</sup>. Kelly is currently enjoying the hospitality of the Federal Detention Center (FDC), SeaTac, Washington.

After the preliminary hearing ended, Kremer worked with the probation office and their post-release unit to resolve probation issues. Although the initial recommendation was that Kelly be ordered to live in a halfway house and continue to be supervised by the court, Kremer argued that Kelly will have served his maximum sentence by the April 13<sup>th</sup> hearing date and therefore the court could not impose any additional conditions. The probation office agreed, and on April 1st changed their position, writing: “we will be recommending Father Kelly’s term of probation to be revoked and he be sentenced to time served with no option for supervision to follow.”

Kelly was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in the Jesuit order in 1990, and engaged in his first Plowshares action – “Jubilee Plowshares” – in 1995. Since then, he has participated in

numerous Plowshares actions and other witnesses against nuclear weapons and war making. In that time he has spent over 10 years behind bars, and roughly one-third of that time in solitary confinement (for non-cooperation).

Most recently, on April 4, 2018, on the 50th anniversary of the assassination of **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**, Kelly and others, known as the the [Kings Bay Plowshares](#) 7, entered Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay, the US Navy's East Coast Trident nuclear ballistic missile submarine base. All seven defendants pled not guilty, insisting that they had not entered the base to commit a crime, but rather to prevent one from occurring, the crime of "omnicide", the destruction of the human race which is possible in a nuclear war. In the face of this threat that the US nuclear arsenal poses to the world, they believed what they had done was not illegal, but a "symbolic disarmament", an act of necessary civil resistance. All seven were found by a jury to be guilty on three felony counts and a misdemeanor charge.



Fr. Kelly conducting Mass and shared Eucharist at the Bangor Trident base on March 12, 2015. (photo by Leonard Eiger, Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action)

Prior to the action at Kings Bay, Kelly and four others, in what is known as the [Disarm Now Plowshares](#), were arrested at Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor on All Souls Day, November 2, 2009, after entering the nuclear warhead storage area at Strategic Weapons Facility Pacific, to expose the nuclear warheads that are deployed on OHIO Class "Trident" ballistic missile submarines. Bangor is home to the Largest Concentration of Deployed Nuclear Weapons in the U.S.

The combined fourteen ballistic missile submarines at Bangor and Kings Bay, carrying the

Trident II D5 ballistic missile armed with some combination of W76-1 (100 kiloton) warheads and W88 (475 kiloton) warheads, in addition to some small number of the newer “low-yield” W76-2 warhead are, in addition to being what the US government calls “the most survivable leg of the US nuclear triad,” arguably a first-strike nuclear weapon, which is inherently destabilizing to any efforts toward cooperation and disarmament efforts with Russia. The continuing warhead modernization and current construction of the next generation of ballistic missile submarines, with plans for a new warhead and missile, is contributing to a new and far less stable nuclear arms race.

As a person of deep spiritual convictions, Fr. Kelly understands that “[It’s a Sin to Build a Nuclear Weapon](#),” as Jesuit Father McSorley once wrote. McSorley explained that, “The taproot of violence in our society today is our intention to use nuclear weapons. Once we have agreed to that, all other evil is minor in comparison. Until we squarely face the question of our consent to use nuclear weapons, any hope of large scale improvement of public morality is doomed to failure.”

Reaching to the heart of Gospel teachings, in Kelly’s own words: “The Gospel has many instances of the parables of Jesus inserting himself between the flock and the dangers; namely the thief and the wolf. In today’s or rather contemporary application of the Gospel is that Christ is incarnate in the poor in the flock and the thief is the budget dedicated to war profiteering and nuclear annihilation. The wolf is the ever-present danger of the threat and, God forbid, the use of nuclear weapons. So it is my life long quest to imitate the Good Shepherd. I will insert myself between the dangers and the flock.”

“In order to use my limited time I will, along with others, try to embody the vision given to us through the prophet Isaiah. It is a conversion of weapons to devices for human production. The gift of Isaiah 2:4 is an economic, political, and moral conversion of the violence of nuclear annihilation. With others, I hope to be instruments in God’s hands for showing a way out of the escalation, the proliferation of this scourge of humanity. I feel strongly that Martin Luther King Jr. would agree with the principle I attribute to Gandhi that we cannot be fully human while one nuclear weapon exists.”

Aside from Fr. Kelly’s deeply held, and practiced, beliefs, courts in the US have consistently refused to allow Kelly (and other Plowshares activists) to present any kind of reasonable defense. Federal prosecutors have asked, and judges have agreed, in nearly every case, to prohibit the defendants from introducing anything constituting a reasonable defense – including religious motivations, international law and treaties, Nuremberg principles, necessity defense, or the existence, numbers, or lethality of nuclear weapons, all of which are established, public knowledge and/or precedent.

In contrast to the repressive court system in the US, Plowshares actions have also occurred in Australia, Germany, Holland, Sweden, New Zealand and Scotland, Ireland, and England, and [many of the trials in these cases resulted in jury acquittals](#). In the case of the Pitstop Plowshares, five members of the Catholic Worker Movement who damaged a United States Navy C-40 transport aircraft (enroute to Iraq) at Shannon Airport, Ireland in 2003, were allowed to present a reasonable defense and were acquitted by a jury that determined the defendants had acted to save lives and property in Iraq.

Rather than prosecute Fr. Kelly and others who attempt to shine the light of conscience on nuclear weapons, which represent an omnicidal threat to humanity, the US government

should instead listen to their warnings and begin, as required by Article VI of the [Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons](#) (NPT), to which the US is a signatory, to “pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.”

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*Featured image: Fr. Kelly celebrating the Eucharist by Leonard Eiger, Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action.*

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