



NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

FMI: 405-598-7362

Father John Vrana, local Catholic priest, to receive peace award

The Mertens Peace Award being established to honor those whose work fosters peacemaking in Oklahoma

OKLAHOMA CITY - On Saturday, April 2, The Oklahoma Center for Conscience will present the first annual Mertens Peace Award to Father John Vrana, at a ceremony at Mayflower UCC Church. A native of Oklahoma City who lived and worked here most of his life, Father Vrana was a local diocesan priest who took a public and sometimes controversial role in seeking racial justice, ending war and promoting nonviolence during the years of the civil rights struggle and Vietnam war.

The ceremony will be part of an OCC fundraiser to which the public is invited. Festivities begin at 7pm and the evening will close with a concert of peace songs from local singer/songwriter Peggy Johnson. The event is free, but donations will be gratefully accepted at the door. Beverages and light refreshments will be offered. Mayflower UCC is located at 3901 Northwest 63rd Street in Oklahoma City.

Father Vrana was nominated for the award by Marianne Mertens, as someone whom she felt should be recognized for his long commitment to peace and his courage to take moral but unpopular stands. Marianne and her husband Art, who passed away last year, were founding members of OCC.

Rena Guay, OCC's Executive Director, said that "the Mertens embody the kind of selfless service to grassroots peace and justice causes that we seek to honor with our award, so it is fitting that it carry their name. Their actions over their lives and the people they have helped and inspired are their legacy, a legacy which we hope to echo each year when we present it to a deserving individual or group."

"By recognizing the peace leaders of our past, we hope to inspire a new generation to follow in their footsteps, and so we build on their history and create a more just and peaceful future for all," she said. "Father Vrana is such an individual and we are proud to be able to present him with the first annual Mertens Peace Award."

Father Vrana is currently residing at St. Ann's Nursing Home, where he is visited by those whose lives he touched through his many years of service. Because of his poor health, he will not be able to attend the ceremony; his award will be accepted by Marianne Mertens.

OCC was founded in 2004 by Catholic Peace Fellowship, Joy Mennonite Church, Oklahoma City Friends Meeting (Quakers) and Veterans for Peace as an organization dedicated to ending and preventing war and to support those who resist war as a matter of conscience. For more information, see centerforconscience.org or call 405-598-7362.

Those wishing to donate to OCC in honor of Art Mertens or Father John Vrana can send a check or money order to: Oklahoma Center for Conscience, 504 NE 16th St., Oklahoma City, OK 73104.