News



Activists disrupt the Easter Vigil holding a banner, "Silence = Death," in this screen grab from a video of an evening protest at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York March 30, 2024. Protesters disrupted the vigil, which was part of the Easter Triduum, a three-day period that begins on Holy Thursday and ends on Easter. The protesters called for an immediate cease-fire in the Israel-Hamas war. (OSV News/courtesy XR NYC Palestine Solidarity, an affinity group of Extinction Rebellion)

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Three protesters from a group called "Extinction Rebellion (XR) NYC Palestine Solidarity" were arrested during the March 30 Easter Vigil at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York.

The men — 63-year-old John Rozendaal, 35-year-old Gregory Schwedock and 31-year-old Matthew Menzies — have been charged under New York state law with disruption of a religious service, a spokesperson for the New York Police Department told OSV News.

Rozendaal and Schwedock are residents of New York City; Menzies listed an address in upstate New York, according to police.

The NYPD spokesperson could not confirm if the men, who face misdemeanor charges, are still in custody and referred OSV News to the New York County Criminal Court, which was closed for Easter.

Four videos provided by XR NYC Palestine Solidarity to OSV News — taken from various seats within the pews — show the three men plus two women walking up the center aisle to the area just under the ambo during the Mass, as the lector begins to read in Spanish from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans. At least one of the videos also was posted by the group to its account on X, formerly Twitter.

In one of the XR NYC clips, a middle-aged man and two senior women in the pew ahead of the camera are seen standing up as the lector begins; the man dons a Palestinian scarf and one of the women begins singing "Dona Nobis Pacem" as the

lector proclaims the epistle.

The other five individuals faced the congregation and unfurled a large rectangular banner reading "Silence = Death," framed by a red hourglass (used by environmental protesters to symbolize extinction) and a green olive tree, a reference to Palestine.

A clergy member and several cathedral security staff moved quickly to take hold of the banner, with the protesters shouting and a shoving match ensuing. In a few frames, the unidentified clergy member appears to have been pushed by one of the protesters. The banner holders began shouting, with one of the women displaying a Palestinian scarf, as they were ejected from the cathedral.

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The NYPD spokesperson was unable to confirm to OSV News if the female protesters were charged. The protesters in the pews did not appear to have been escorted from the cathedral, according to the video clips. The lector continued with the reading throughout the disruption.

OSV News is awaiting a response to its request for comment from the Archdiocese of New York and St. Patrick's Cathedral.

According to a press release sent to OSV News, XR NYC Palestine Solidarity describes itself as "an affinity group of Extinction Rebellion New York City activists fighting for a free and peaceful Palestine."

A spokesperson for the group who gave his first name as Miles told OSV News by phone that XR NYC has "probably between 400-700" members, while the Palestine Solidarity group has "about 75 to 100."

XR itself was founded in London in 2018 as what it calls "a global movement that uses nonviolent civil disobedience in an attempt to halt mass extinction and minimize the risk of social collapse." The group currently claims to have 988 local groups in 87 countries.

Rozendaal told OSV News in a text message that St. Patrick's Cathedral was chosen for the protest since it is "one of the most prestigious and powerful institutions in

New York City (the Diocese of New York), and in the world (the Roman Catholic Church)."

In his text, Rozendaal described the protest as a "daunting, actually frightening proposition," adding that "the act of disobedience and disorder … has to be weighed against the option of a silence which is complicity in genocide —- 2 million people now being starved to death."

On its website, XR states that it is a decentralized movement that relies on "crowdfunding, major donors, NGOs, trusts and foundations" as well as "practical support from a company called Compassionate Revolution which processes donations and spends them to support the movement."

Compassionate Revolution's last available financial report was made public in December 2021.