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## Charges dropped against anti-Obama protesters

by Daniel Burke by Religion News Service

An Indiana prosecutor May 5 dropped trespassing charges against nearly 80 anti-abortion activists who protested President Obama's 2009 commencement address and honorary degree at the University of Notre Dame.

Because Obama supports legalized abortion, some Catholics -- including dozens of bishops -- accused Notre Dame of tacitly endorsing his views and violating church teaching.

In all, 94 protesters were arrested for refusing to leave Notre Dame's campus as the date of Obama's speech approached in May 2009.

St. Joseph County Prosecuting Attorney Michael Dvorak said he is "confident that convictions could have been secured," but has "decided not to stand in the way of the university's efforts to reconcile with the charged defendants."

"Rather than pursuing criminal litigation, the defendants and the victim, Notre Dame, wish to put these prior criminal trespass acts behind them," Dvorak said in a statement.

Notre Dame and the Thomas More Society, a Chicago-based Catholic law firm that represented about 80 protesters, reached an agreement "in the spirit of reconciliation and continuing dialogue" not to pursue charges.

"From the start, everyone involved in this difficult matter has been in complete accord on the sanctity of human life, and we all remain committed to continuing our work to support life from conception to natural death," said Holy Cross Fr. John I. Jenkins, Notre Dame's president, in a statement.

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