Ousted Norwegian pastor brings message to U.S.

by Doug Trouten

Norway — The eyes of the world will turn to Scandinavia this winter as the 17th Olympic Winter Games take place in Lillehammer, Norway. Norwegian pastor Ludvig Nessa, who was stripped of his parish by the government because of his stand against abortion (see *Life Advocate*, May 1991), is inviting pro-life Christians to come together in this country during the February games to stand against abortion.

Nessa was a pastor in the Church of Norway, the Lutheran body that is the state church of Norway, headed by the King. Abortion on demand became the policy of the state in 1978, and few pastors have spoken against it. But on Constitution Day in 1984, Nessa told his congregation about his experience as a young theology student in Germany.

"I was in a city not far from the site of a concentration camp in the Second World War," he recalls. "I saw all of those terrible pictures from the concentration camp. It was unbelievable how they could treat the people in those camps. I went out to see the mass graves. There were 500 buried in one grave, 1000 in another. I saw one with 5000. It made a strong impression. I got angry. I didn't know what to say or think. I went out and drove away. I hadn't driven more than a minute when I came to the closest village. I thought, 'What kind of people were living here? Why didn't they speak up?' They had to have known what was going on. Then I had to say, what would've happened if they had spoken up?, and I had to admit Hitler would have killed them. I had to ask, if I had been living there, would I have been willing to give up my own life, in the hope of saving others?"

Nessa told his congregation about that experience, and explained that something similar was happening in Norway. He encouraged his people to oppose abortion. The sermon made headlines in the local paper and drew criticism from Nessa's bishop. Nessa repeated his pro-life appeal a year later, in another Constitution Day sermon. "I said I had read somewhere that during the Second World War, the Nazis had killed about 11,000 Norwegians during the five years we were occupied by the Germans," he says. "I said, 'Now we are killing even more every year, and I think we need to repent.'"

Again, Nessa's sermon made headlines, and drew criticism. His pro-life activism continued. In 1986 he helped organize a pro-life rally which drew 14,000 people—one for every child aborted in Norway since legalization. "I think it was the biggest rally there has ever been in Norway, but the newspapers and the media didn't mention it at all. There was a demonstration which some homosexuals did in Norway on the same day, perhaps 50 of them, and they got the big coverage in the newspaper."

Nessa didn't back down. He showed the pro-life film "Silent Scream" to his confirmation class, and to his congregation. He and another pastor visited an Oslo abortion clinic; when the doctor refused to see them they stayed in the lobby singing hymns until police came to arrest them. "From that moment, my bishop decided in connection with the government that they would have to fire me," he says. Nessa continued his pro-life activism, including a publicity generating stunt in which tiny dolls in blood like ketchup were mailed to national leaders.

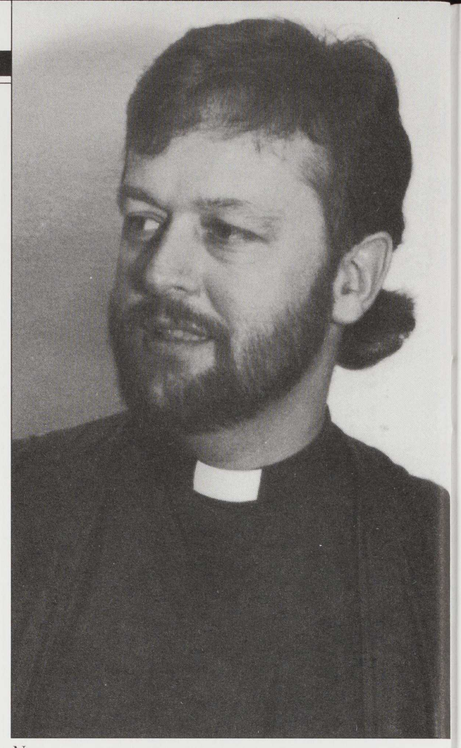
Since the Church of Norway is an arm of the government, its pastors are civil servants, and firing a civil servant takes time. While efforts to fire Nessa were underway, television news reporters came to his services. "They wanted to be in my last service, but it took half a year," Nessa says. "Because of the threatening, my church services were on television for six months."

Nessa was finally suspended in 1988, and since then has been through three court trials, all of which he has lost. Though thrown physically out of his parish house, Nessa has rented a house where he conducts independent worship services, attracting a larger audience than he did before.

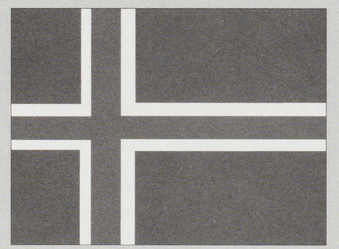
"I was convicted and defrocked," he says. "I'm convicted for an offense against section 15 of the Civil Service Act, which requires a civil servant to 'maintain the confidence and respect of other people.' They have 15 points against me, and all of them are clearly connected with my stand against abortion."

Being removed from his parish has been a liberating experience for Nessa. "That's the irony," he laughs. "When I had lost what I was afraid to lose, I suddenly saw that I'm free! They can't take anything else away from me, so I'm not scared of them any more."

Nessa has increased his pro-life activism even more, including this trip to the United States to encourage participation in pro-life activities in Norway during the Winter Olympics. "Millions of homes in the whole world will be open for us," he says. "Almost every body will be looking to Norway. It is a tremendous opportunity for evangelism and pro-life activities."■



Nessa



Those interested in joining Rev. Nessa for activities in Norway are invited to contact Operation Rescue National at 407-259-9557. Costs for departure from Baltimore or Orlando run approximately $1,000 which includes airfare, dormitory housing, food and transportation in Norway.

Charges dismissed against pro-abort "stalkers"

Minneapolis, MN—Stalking charges have been dropped against four pro-choice activists who were arrested while following a caravan of Operation Rescue supporters during the pro-life ministry's "Cities of Refuge" campaign this summer. A prolife activist who was arrested for allegedly following an abortion clinic security guard still faces stalking charges.

Police arrested the four pro-choice activists in July, when the caravan of vehicles they were tailing pulled into a gas station, called police, and pointed them out. The driver, Jennifer Leazer of Minneapolis, was charged with stalking. Her three passengers, Kathleen Winters of St. Paul, and Lisa Strong and Andrea Jachman of Minneapolis, were charged with aiding and abetting stalking. Winters is an assistant attorney general. When they were all arrested the four had a video camera and papers containing the license plate numbers and physical descriptions of the pro-life activists they were following.

The pro-life activist, Brian Oates, was arrested after allegedly following abortion clinic security guard Michael James Carlson, though according to an affidavit filed by St. Louis Park police investigator Patrick Collins. Carlson was following Oates at the time of the arrest.

The two cases were handled differently from the outset. After Oates was arrested, police obtained an unusually broad search warrant and seized various records from the home where Oates was a guest—including the donor records of the crisis pregnancy center where his host is employed. According to the search warrant request, police were looking for evidence of a "conspiracy" to stalk.

But in the case of the four pro-choice "stalkers," no search warrant was executed. Thomas Rothstein, assistant city attorney for St. Louis Park, said the charges against the four pro-choicers were dropped after their attorneys argued that the women were serving as "legal observers" for the Network to Ensure Access. He said the city would not have been able to prove beyond a "reasonable doubt" that the women's intent was to "intimidate and harass."

St. Louis Park has not dropped stalking charges against Oates. Oates said, "Some were concerned when the law was first passed that it was going to be used to really come down hard on pro-lifers and those who were not politically correct. Those fears are very much justified. It would appear that the powers that be are now using their power to crush those who do not follow their same belief."

Paris Getty, the attorney representing Oates, argued Oct. 21 that his client is being "selectively prosecuted, and urged Hennepin County District Judge E. Anne McKinsey to strike down the stalking law as unconstitutional. McKinsey will determine the law's constitutionality within 90 days.■