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## Phila. gun-shop protesters acquitted

By Vernon Clark

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Twelve activists from the interfaith group Heeding God's Call who were arrested at Colosimo's gun shop in Philadelphia in January were acquitted of all charges in a one-day bench trial in Municipal Court.

After hearing a full day of testimony in a crowded courtroom, Judge Karen Yvette Simmons found the members of the group, many of them area clergy, not guilty of conspiracy, defiant trespassing, disorderly conduct, and obstructing a highway, all misdemeanors.

The Rev. Isaac Miller, pastor of North Philadelphia's Church of the Advocate, a member of the group, hailed the trial as raising awareness about gun violence in Philadelphia.

"I hope the trial gets more people thinking about the issue and becoming more committed" to reducing gun violence, Miller said.

He said the acquittal was a "real big relief. I frankly believe the judge did not have a whole lot of choice on this one."

Miller's codefendants were the Rev. David Tatgenhorst, the Rev. James McIntire, Rabbi Yitzak Nates, the Rev. Fred Kauffman, Kemah Washington, Miriam Copp, Melissa DeLong, Sam Caldwell, the Rev. Phillip Jones, Keith Noah Merrill, and Darryl Boyd.

The trial, which drew a crowd of about 150 people, had to be moved from a courtroom on the 10th floor of the Criminal Justice Center to the third floor to accommodate the large number of observers.

Simmons heard narrative testimony from nine of the 12 defendants before saying: "Based on the evidence presented to me, I find you all not guilty."

In his closing statement, Assistant District Attorney Guy D'Andrea said the case was "about individuals going to a private person's business to disrupt that business."

The 12 were accused in connection with a protest held inside and outside Colosimo's Gun Center on Jan. 14 and 16, the days before and after the birthday of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. They were arrested after they refused to leave the shop.

James Colosimo, the owner of the shop at 10th and Spring Garden Streets, testified yesterday that during

the protests he talked with about five people who came into the store seeking to have him sign a 10-point voluntary code of conduct to reduce "straw purchases" of firearms.

"I told them three to five times they couldn't be inside the store," Colosimo told the court.

D'Andrea said Colosimo had agreed with nine of the points of the code, which advocates called the "Responsible Firearms Retailer Partnership."

Colosimo testified that in two previous meetings with the group, he objected to one proposal of the code that calls for a system to log the tracing of guns used in crimes.

D'Andrea had contended that the protesters used their bodies to block the vestibule of the gun store.

Defense lawyer Lloyd Long 3d argued in court that access to the store was not obstructed.

"There has been no evidence that anyone who wanted to get in could not get in," Long said.

Before the trial, a prayer service in support of the protesters was held at the Arch Street United Methodist Church.


After the verdict, defense attorney Lawrence Krasner said, "Justice was done. I hope Mr. Colosimo thinks twice before he continues to do what he has been doing."

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