

Episcopal clergy convicted after N.Y. "Occupy" demonstration

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c. 2012 Religion News Service NEW YORK (RNS/ENInews) A retired Episcopal bishop and a Harlem priest were among seven people convicted Monday (June 18) on charges of trespassing on property owned by one of the Episcopal Church's wealthiest parishes at the height of the Occupy protests.

Bishop George Packard, who oversaw the military and federal ministries before he retired, and the Rev. Earl Kooperkamp of St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Harlem, were sentenced to four days of community service. They had faced up to 90 days in prison on the most serious charge, Packard's lawyer, Gideon Oliver, told Episcopal News Service.

An eighth defendant, Mark Adams, was sentenced to 45 days on charges of trespassing, attempted criminal mischief and attempted possession of burglar's tools, reportedly for trying to use bolt-cutters to slice through the fence surrounding a parcel of land owned by Trinity Church, off Wall Street in downtown Manhattan.

Trinity's rector, the Rev. James Cooper, said the landmark church supported many of the Occupy movement's goals and would continue to welcome protestors to its facilities in the Wall Street neighborhood, but said in a statement that it did "not support the seizure of private property."

Packard and Kooperkamp were among 65 people arrested after entering the property as part of an Occupy protest on Dec. 17 marking the end of the third month since the anti-corporate movement's launch.

Occupy leaders had been lobbying Trinity to use church property for a winter encampment after the group was evicted from nearby Zuccotti Park. Trinity had refused, citing a lack of facilities at the site and a lease agreement allowing the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council to use it for periodic art installations.

Packard said he was surprised, disappointed and saddened by the trial's outcome.

"Trinity did not have to pursue the charges, but it opted to 'protect fiduciary interests,'" Packard told Episcopal News Service. "It's pretty sad. I mean, this is what our church has come to. You don't have enough pledging units to sustain many places. So we depend on the cash flow of corporate investment. It's a caricature of what the Gospel is."

Trinity Wall Street, established in 1697, is one of the Episcopal Church's most prominent parishes. It is now a major commercial real estate owner in lower Manhattan and its Trinity Grants program supports projects throughout the world.