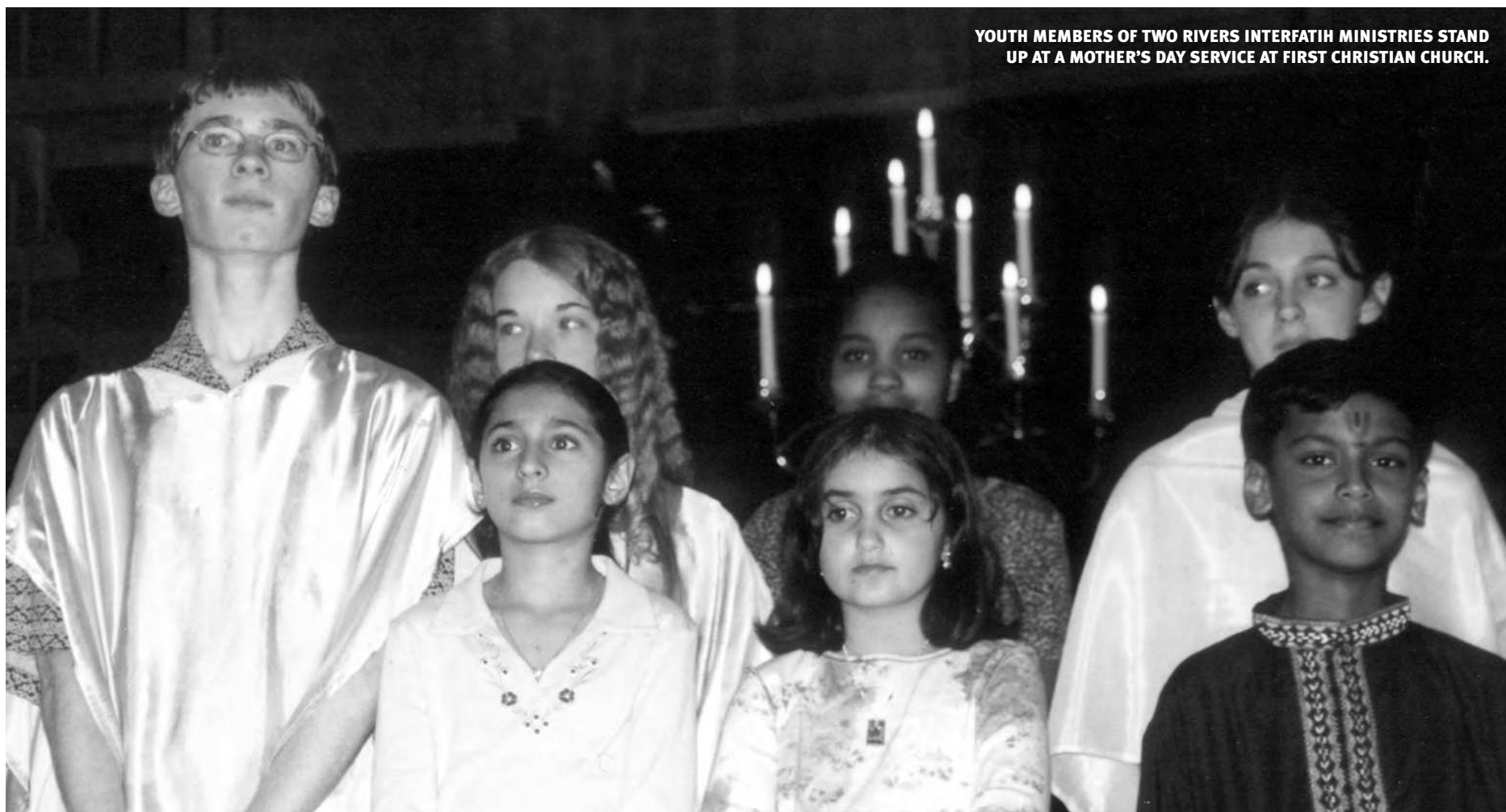




FAITH IN ACTION

LOCAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS SAY WAR ISSUES PERSIST.

STORY & PHOTOS BY TED TAYLOR

Some 30 Eugene area religious leaders gathered the morning of April 30 for a major press conference — without the press. The media were preoccupied that day. Eugene Police called a press conference the same morning in advance of an afternoon press conference by Whiteaker residents about their lawsuit against the city. *Eugene Weekly* was on deadline. But Faith in Action organizers figure they were mostly ignored because Gulf War II is over — so what's the point of an anti-war statement now?

"The point is that the concerns transcend the war," says Steven Deutsch, a Quaker and one of the group's organizers.

"We just thought it was very important that clergy take a stand, and not just an individual clergy person but a group of clergy," says Irwin Noparstak, a Jewish member and organizer. "Also, by not saying anything, there is a notion of condoning what's going on, and we don't."

Faith in Action prepared an 11-page hand-out for the April 30 press conference that included a joint statement and individual statements.

"The prophetic and compassionate voice in all of our faith traditions compels us to speak to these issues," reads the joint statement. "We do not pretend that there is unity amongst us and the communities we represent on the current U.S. war on Iraq, or on

how to express support for American military personnel. Yet we must speak as we mourn the casualties, civilian and military, of any nationality, in the war in Iraq. Our nation is divided and most of the world opposes what the U.S. is doing."

The statement goes on to voice concerns about the potential for U.S. nuclear first strike, extending military action to Syria and Iran, and support for national religious organizations that have taken stands against the war.

A Moral Imperative

The issues existed long before the Iraq offensive, but were made worse by the U.S. war on terrorism, says Noparstak. "Right after 9/11 there was a massive slashing and cutting of funds from women's issues, children's issues, health issues ... even cutting veterans' benefits," he says. "There's a moral imperative to take a position about that, and who is best in a community to take a moral and ethical stand than people of faith?"

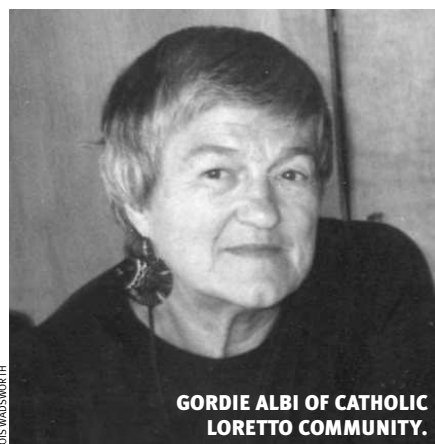
Deutsch says Faith in Action has sponsored vigils, worked with other peace groups and lobbied congressional lawmakers, "but there had not previously been a statement of concern that went beyond the war in Iraq and we wanted to talk about the impact of that war, not only in human terms, but internationally, and the consequences for the future."

Deutsch says the group is concerned about the domestic U.S. budget, excessive military spending and the "tragic consequences" of underfunding social, medical and human services.

"And finally," he says, "what about the issues locally that the war and the crisis in that part of the world are generating in terms of religious bigotry and intolerance? Particularly targeting Muslims and Sikhs and other vulnerable communities?"

Gordie Albi, a Catholic and a steering committee member of Faith in Action, has followed U.S. foreign policy since she lived and worked in war-torn Nicaragua.

"This is not the first (U.S.) preemptive strike," she says. "We've done it many times



LOIS WASSWORTH

GORDIE ALBI OF CATHOLIC LORETTO COMMUNITY.

PRAYER & REFLECTION

More than 200 people of faith gathered May 11 for an Interfaith Service of Prayer & Reflection at First Christian Church, 1166 Oak St. The gathering, sponsored by Two Rivers Interfaith Ministry, has met at 7 pm the 11th of every month since 9/11. This meeting coincided with Mother's Day.

The program included a tribute to "all mothers, grandmothers, Mother Earth and the Nurturing Principle of the Divine." Presentations of song, music, verse, dance and prayer were by youth representing Methodists, Willamette Christian School, Baha'i, Islam, Sikh, Buddhism, Powerhouse Ministries, Hindu, Judaism and Native Americans.

In his introductory remarks, 17-year-old Ben Hunter said, "Twenty months ago, we realized that if we continue to justify harming and killing others — in the name of God — we will all kill each other off. The possible extinction of humankind, by our own self-destructive pride. This is unlikely to be what God wants. Tolerance isn't enough any more. Sharing, understanding and respect are our best hope for moving into the future."

The next service will be at 7 pm Wednesday, June 11, at First Christian Church. The June theme will be "The Glorious Sacred Abundance of All Creation." For more information, e-mail interfaith@vyanet.com