



April 28, 2009

City & Borough of Juneau  
Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee  
c/o 155 South Seward Street  
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Subject: Naming of Park at 3<sup>rd</sup> and Seward Streets

Dear Committee Members:

Please consider recommending to the Assembly that the small “pocket park” at 3<sup>rd</sup> and Seward Streets be named the

### **BISHOP MICHAEL H. KENNY MEMORIAL PEACE PARK**

At our meeting on Saturday, April 18, the Juneau Chapter of Veterans for Peace voted unanimously to make this recommendation. As explained below, we did not do so lightly.

#### Background

Some time ago, when the Seward Street reconstruction was undertaken by the CBJ, one of our members (downtown business owner Don Birdseye) suggested that the new park that was to emerge on the space previously occupied by the visitors’ log cabin could be called a “Peace Park.” At the time, we made some preliminary inquiries of CBJ staff and it was suggested that we wait at least until the Park was constructed.

For the last couple of years, the idea has been growing. A few weeks ago, we contacted Mayor Botelho who, in turn, asked Mr. Matsil to convey the naming policy.

When we reviewed the policy, we noted that there was no classification for names that would address a concept or an idea (e.g., “peace”); instead, the classifications include “Places.., Historic sites, Descriptive Names, Living People, Organizations, or Deceased People.” Upon reflection, we could think of no one whose name would be more appropriate than Bishop Michael H. Kenny – a man whose entire life embodied the principles of peace and justice and love.

#### Bishop Kenny

The Most Reverend Michael Hughes Kenny served as Bishop of the Diocese of Juneau from 1979 until his untimely death (from an aneurism while visiting Jordan) in February 1995. There are two books in which his life and thoughts were memorialized.

The first is *I Danced With Joy – Bishop Michael Kenny Remembers*, edited by Kathy Vanderjack and Karla Donaghey (Green Heron Press, 1998). The book is a compendium of anecdotes and memories contributed by many people, mostly Juneau people, and serves to provide a truly broad perspective on the Bishop’s personality, his sense of humor, his devotion to human love, and his commitment to peace.

The second book is ***Stretching the Boundaries***, a compilation of the Bishop's writings as published over the years in Inside Passage, the Diocesan newsletter. ***Stretching the Boundaries*** was published in 1995 by the Diocese.

Taken together, these books provide valuable insights into the character and the charisma of Bishop Kenny. He had a profound effect on Juneau, and all of Southeast Alaska, not only the Catholic community, but on all citizens.

The "Bish" (as he was called with affection by many) was an avid fan of theater and the arts; he never missed a High School musical or a performance by Juneau-Douglas Little Theatre or Perseverance Theatre, and was quick to share his joy with the artists and to encourage them to do more. He was a runner, a great cook, a story-teller, an inspiring ecumenical leader, a healer, and a peace-maker.

### Peace

Early in his priestly career, Bishop Kenny became a leading advocate for peace and nuclear disarmament. He was a pacifist and his anti-nuclear activities in the early 1980s earned him the sobriquet "No Nukes of the North!" The Bishop protested the naming of the USS Alaska, a nuclear-armed submarine, stating:

*We want to say no to giving the names of persons and places we really love and cherish to Tridents and all the nuclear weapons of this world. We want to say no to the Trident itself and its capacity to kill in our names...we want to say no to Star Wars and the expansion of violence into the deep and beautiful darkness of outer space. And I want to say yes to hope.*

In November 1990, as our country geared up for "Operation Desert Storm," Bishop Kenny led a delegation of reconciliation to Baghdad where he worked for the release of hostages and the avoidance of war. Of that trip, and of his views in general, he wrote:

*I love this country and the ideals upon which it was founded and which it constantly struggles to live up to. I love the people of this country. For all our shortcomings, failures and even sins, there is a spirit, a generosity and an enthusiasm about us that has at times dazzled the world. More than anything else, I care about the men and women who make up our military forces, especially those who are currently in the Persian Gulf. I do not want to see them either kill or be killed in a war that is not moral or just. If such were to be the case, the survivors will surely envy the dead.*

In January 1991, on the night before our military commenced the bombing of Baghdad, Bishop Kenny opened the doors to the Cathedral of the Nativity and invited the whole community to join in a vigil to contemplate the horrors that were to come. Although some prayed, the experience was ecumenical and non-sectarian; each person there was encouraged to seek peace in any way s/he chose.

### The Park

We believe that Bishop Kenny's love of humanity and community, and his unstinting dedication to peace and reconciliation should be recognized and honored in our Capital City. To that end, the small downtown park, designed with seating for the weary, would be an entirely appropriate venue. Signage

could be used to explain the background of the park, to introduce the person and purposes for which it is dedicated, and to invite users to rest and reflect upon those purposes.

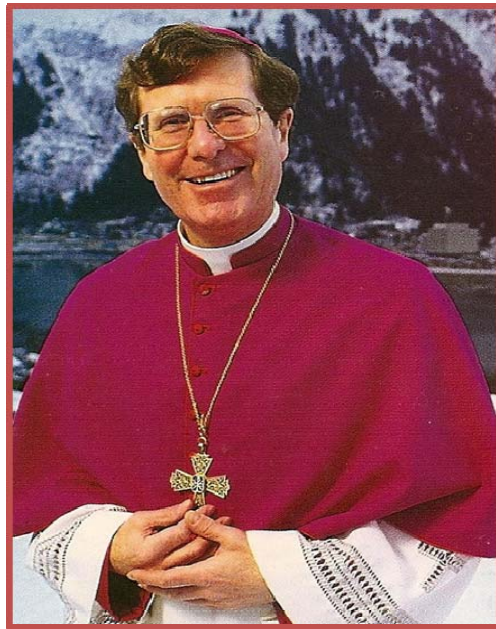
We are not familiar with all of the relevant CBJ park policies, but we can and do commit to assisting in developing appropriate signage and in modest maintenance efforts (clearing trash and litter, sweeping, etc.) In fact, we would be eager to make that small contribution on behalf of the many military veterans who share Bishop Kenny's moving and inspiring commitment to the imperative of peace in our times.

Thanks very much for your consideration of this possibility.

Sincerely,

**VETERANS FOR PEACE, CHAPTER 100**

s/Philip J. Smith, President  
1782 Evergreen Ave.  
Juneau, AK 99801  
907.586.1175 (h)  
907.723.1369 (c)  
[philips@alaska.com](mailto:philips@alaska.com)



**MOST REVEREND MICHAEL H. KENNY**  
Bishop of Juneau, 1979 - 1995