

# Protesters charge hospital chaplain beaten

ERIC LIPTON *Courant Staff Writer*

*The Hartford Courant (1923-1995)*; May 19, 1990; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Hartford Courant  
pg. B7F

## Protesters charge hospital chaplain beaten

By ERIC LIPTON  
*Courant Staff Writer*

NEWTOWN — A crowd of angry workers at Fairfield Hills Hospital rallied Friday to protest what they called an unprovoked and brutal arrest last week by hospital police of a black woman who is a hospital chaplain.

The Rev. Melvinia S. Parker, 38, was walking to a daytime movie downtown May 12 when a hospital police officer stopped her and asked for identification, hospital police said.

Parker, who was off duty and not on hospital grounds, did not have her identification with her, said her attorney, Judith Mauzaka of Bridgeport.

Parker said she was not dressed in clerical garb.

Parker was offended by the officer's tone and decided to not identify

herself, Mauzaka said.

Hospital police, who work for the state Department of Mental Health, were looking for several patients who were reported missing — none of them black women, hospital Superintendent Dennis E. Angelini said Friday. He added that to protect the public and the hospital's 460 patients, security must prevent patients from wandering off.

Hospital police have jurisdiction and arrest powers anywhere in the state, as long as they are pursuing hospital business, said Robert F. Taylor, director of safety and security for the mental health department. "It is not uncommon for police officers to stop people they don't recognize," Angelini said. "But if there has been excessive use of authority, of course I am concerned."

An officer twisted Parker's right arm, threw her to the ground, knelt her in the back and then put hand-

cuffs on her, Mauzaka said. A second officer arrived who recognized Parker, but did not stop the arrest, Mauzaka said. Parker was charged with interfering with an officer.

"All the information at my disposal indicates she was approached, questioned and treated by security police with extreme insensitivity to her race, her sex and her humanity," Mauzaka said. Parker, who reportedly received bruises and abrasions on her back, wrists and neck, was released on a promise to appear May 29 at Superior Court in Danbury.

She has not been at work since the incident.

Hospital workers gathered at noontime on the steps of Newtown Hall, the administration building of the state mental hospital.

"There was no probable cause for her to be arrested or for her to even be stopped, other than the fact that she was black and she was walking

down Queen Street in Newtown," said Paul H. Fortier, a union organizer for the New England Health Care Employees Union District 1199, AFL-CIO. Parker is a union member.

"If this is how this particular officer — or any officer — treats a reverend who works for the state, what happens to patients?"

Fortier demanded that the charge against Parker be dropped, and said he is asking the U.S. Justice Department, the state police and the state attorney general to investigate the incident.

Angelini said he is trying to determine whether Parker was on hospital property, whether police were correct to question her and whether they handled the questioning properly.