



Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

Sister Christine Wagner, SSJ, helps Chris Grannis, who portrayed Jesus, to assemble his cross.

Group prays for peace at depot

CANA sponsors annual Good Friday service

By Teresa A. Parsons

People on both sides of the chain-link fence that surrounds the Seneca Army Depot were uncomfortable last Friday afternoon.

The nearly 40 people who gathered outside the fence on Good Friday were members and supporters of Catholics Against Nuclear Arms (CANA). They came to pray the Stations of the Cross on the anniversary of the day Jesus died, because of the life-threatening nature of the estimated 1,300 nuclear warheads they believe are stored at the depot.

People traveled from Rochester, Ithaca, Hammondsport, Chili and Geneva to walk along the grassy strip between Route 96A and the depot fence, led by a man dressed in a white robe and carrying a cross. Cars whizzed past and drivers honked their horns as the group paused to pray and sing at each telephone pole, marking the steps on a contemporary Way of the Cross by recalling the present-day suffering of those who are hungry, homeless, oppressed and imprisoned.

As they walked alongside their parents, children raised their faces to a helicopter hovering overhead. Their expressions were merely curious, whereas their elders stiffly avoided returning the inscrutable gazes of sheriff's deputies and depot security guards who watched their every move from vehicles parked nearby.

Inside the fence, the only person visible was a security guard at the depot gate. When a group of people from the outside approached the guard to present him with a loaf of bread as a peace offering, he thanked them for not causing any trouble.

Although they never said so, the guard and his counterparts were presumably a little uncomfortable about being prayed over, and a little anxious about whether the demonstration would remain peaceful.

They had little reason for fear. Ever since the Seneca Army Depot was identified as a storage site for nuclear weapons seven or eight years ago, people from across the Diocese of Rochester have gathered there on Good Friday for peaceful, prayerful demonstrations. When CANA was founded five years ago, its members began organizing the Stations of the Cross.

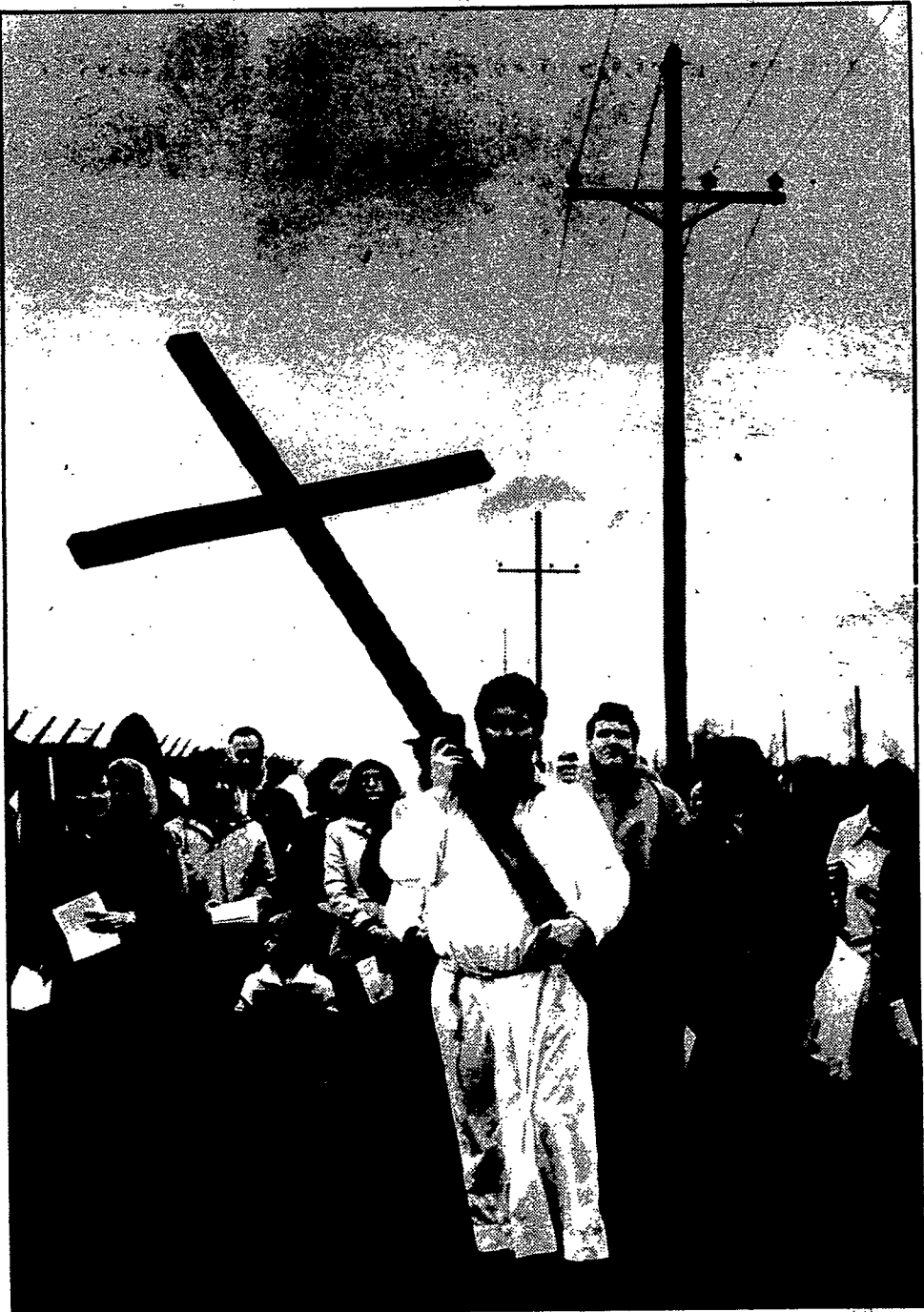
Located on the eastern shore of Seneca Lake in Romulus, the Seneca Army Depot is currently considered to be the largest U.S. Army storage site for nuclear weapons in the world, according to William N. Arkin, director of nuclear weapons research at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C.

Arkin, who co-wrote a book entitled *Nuclear Battlefields; Global Links in the Arms Race*, says the depot is also the "dumping ground" for some 400 neutron bombs, which the Reagan administration ordered produced in 1981, but which European governments have thus far refused to deploy.

Defense department spokesmen routinely refuse to either confirm or deny such reports. Thus, the statistics cited by Arkin and other defense experts are deduced from observations about where nuclear weapons are produced, the routes by which they are shipped, the physical layout of storage facilities at the depot and the degree of security and surveillance at the site.

Phil Barber used to think that much of what was wrong with the world was represented within the depot's fence. For most of the past five years, he has traveled to the Romulus site on Good Friday to pray and to keep the need for peace making fresh in his mind. This year, he and his wife, Alice, brought their year-old daughter along.

Lately Barber's view of the depot has shifted. He is beginning to conclude that the depot actually reflects his own hostile tendencies and those of the people around him.



Chris Grannis leads a procession of nearly 40 worshippers through the Stations of the Cross along Route 96A. Telephone poles were used to designate the stations.

"For a long time, I thought places like this were the most evil things in the world," he said. "It's easy to forget the little snide and curt remarks you make to the people around you — to your spouse or to your dear friends."

For nine confirmation candidates from St. Christopher's Parish in North Chili, their first visit to the depot was a novel and perplexing experience.

Controversy preceded their trip. Several parents objected to the trip, even though the activity was optional. In the end, fewer than half of the 24 teenagers in the class traveled to the depot.

Not all of the nine students who participated were opposed to nuclear weapons in general or the depot in particular. Jenny Coffey, 14, said she came because she believes nuclear arms are destroying the


world. Standing next to her was fellow candidate Dave Vanderstyn, who pointed out that the depot and other military installations provide jobs for people who might otherwise be unemployed.

"Yeah, but is it worth it?" Coffey wondered.

Fourteen-year-old Corby Stevens went to the depot because he was told to by his mother. Although he termed the trip a worthwhile experience, he was depressed by reminders of "all bad things our race had done."

But George Mancuso, an eighth-grader, refused to accept a vision of the future clouded by what he views as past and present misadventures.

"I'm here to prove that this is a bad thing, and to try and make a better world," he said.



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