

# 'Everyman' expresses fears of facing death

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

During the late Middle Ages, the Black Death swept across Europe, decimating the population. Historians estimate that in England alone, the population dropped more than 40 percent between 1340 and 1400 as a result of the plague.

In this climate of sudden, violent death, people's minds were naturally filled with fear for their lives — and their souls. Death, and preparation for it, became a topic for many homilists and writers.

"Everyman" is a product of this preoccupation with death. The play, written in the latter 15th century, presents an individual — intended to represent "every man" — facing death and finding himself deserted by characters who symbolize friends, family and material goods. In the end, only his good deeds accompany him into the grave.

Such an overtly moralistic play might seem out of place in contemporary times — and certainly not a play teens and young adults might consciously choose.

But Corning's Marian Players, a group of performers ranging in age from 15-24, have staged a slightly updated version of the play. They unveiled their production of "Everyman" at St. Joseph's, Wayland, Saturday, Aug. 12, and followed that with a performance at St. Patrick's, Corning, the next day.

According to the director, Dan Healy, the group chose "Everyman" because its message is as true today as it was 400 years ago. "The basic message that death can come to anyone at any time hasn't changed," he explained.

"The message is asking the world — and every man — are they ready to die, ready to meet God, ready to be held accountable for their life," noted Rich Palumbo, a seminarian at Holy Apostle's Seminary in Cromwell, Conn., and the actor portraying

Everyman. "Death comes when God wills, and we'd better be prepared for it."

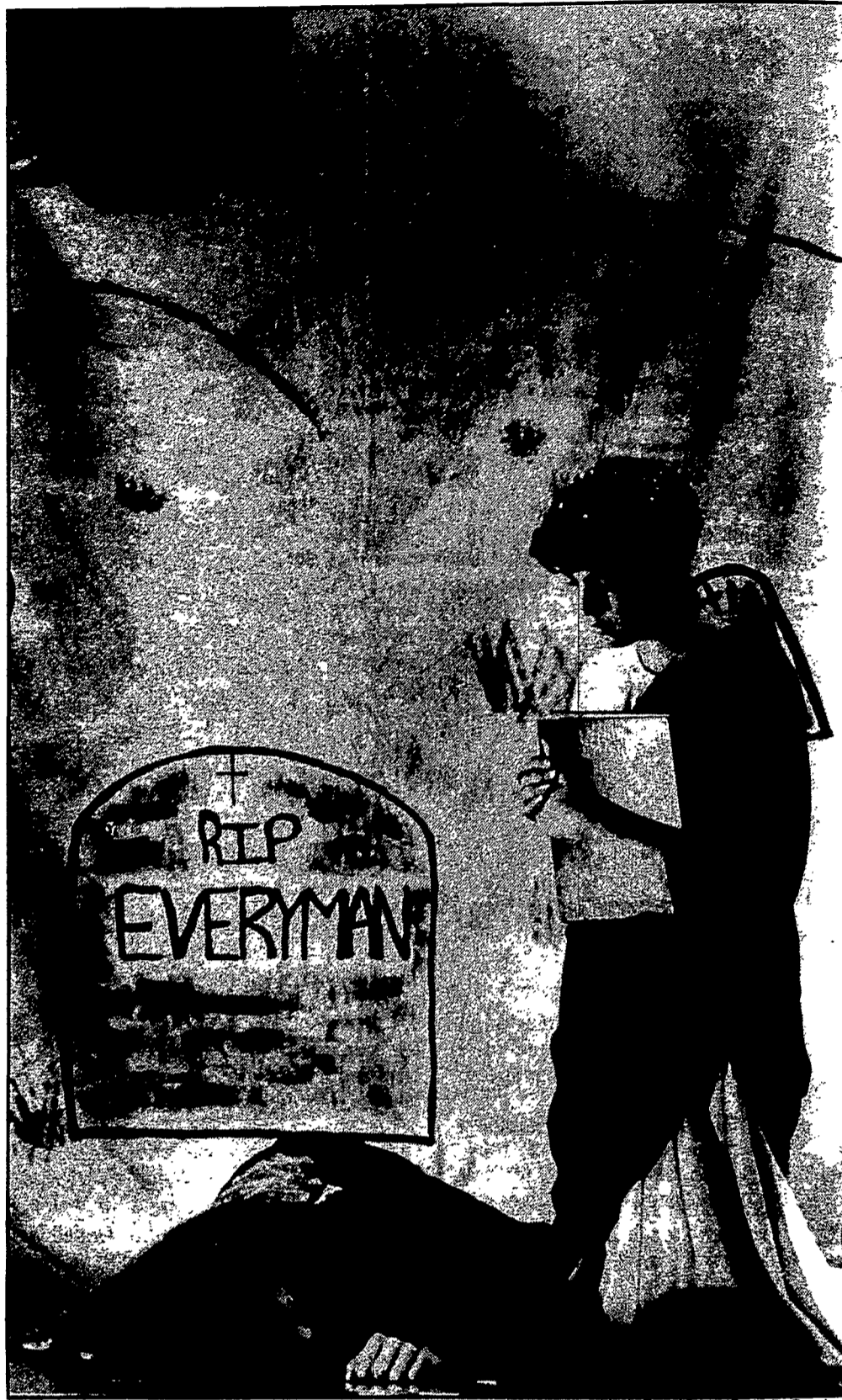
Although the play emphasizes the fact that death can come at any time, Healy said its message is essentially hopeful. "It isn't just we are all faced with death and there's nothing we can do about it," he said. "(The play) tells us this is how we can prepare for it — not relying on worldly goods, our friends and relations. We have our good deeds. We have God."

Focusing on God very much fits in with the spirit and intent of the Marian Players. The troupe is composed of members and the children of members of the Anawim Community in Corning. The community, which has existed since 1976, is dedicated to serving the Catholic Church and to a life of prayer, "so that we can become abandoned to God, so he can use us rather than us doing what we want," explained Barbara Brennan, the community's co-director.

Community members regularly meet in various prayer and study groups. The Marian Players, in fact, grew out of the group for teens. The meetings frequently include a lesson and at the end of the meetings, the teens put on skits to illustrate these lessons.

Healy, who worked with the youth group, decided to try to harness the teens' interest in performing and formed the Marian Players. "We saw the power of drama to convey the Gospel," he explained. The number of young people involved with the community had grown, he added, and he and the community's leaders saw the theatrical group as a "way to channel their energy into serving their church."

In March and April, they put on their first play, "Where Love Is," which is based on Tolstoy's story, "Martin the Cobbler." As soon as that production was over, Healy began searching for new plays, but encountered some difficulties.



Linda Dow Hayes/Catholic Courier

Good Deeds (Megan Gaffney) kneels beside the body of Everyman (Richard Palumbo), during the Saturday night performance of "Everyman" at St. Joseph's Church in Wayland. Corning's Marian Players, a group of performers ranging in age from 15-24, staged the updated version of the 15th-century play.

"It's difficult to choose a play that has a good, solid message and is a presentable play," Healy said. Many of the plays that conveyed positive, moral messages, he explained, were trite or poorly written. Others, such as Shakespeare's plays, were beyond the current abilities of the fledgling group. Then, he discovered a version of "Everyman" in which the archaic language had been modernized, and the group had found its second production.

According to Brennan, the Marian Players have been encouraged and supported by the community's leaders because they see the group as a way not only to evangelize, but also to teach the community's youths. "It's a way of Christian formation," she said.

Frank Olmes, who plays Fellowship in the production, acknowledged that he has been affected by the play. "When I look at it now, I'm going to think (about) what's more important to me," the 15-year-old observed. "Is it money, friends? The play tells you that the only thing that's going to do good for you is good deeds and God."

This is a message that needs to be taught to young people today because of the power of peer pressure, Olmes said. Supporting a theater group comprising young people to spread the word is one way to reach other youths, he said. "I think it's a real good way to portray positive morality to young kids," he asserted. "It's not as boring as just a lecture. You can enjoy it and still learn something from it."

"I guess the thing is, youth will relate to it better because the youth are putting it

on," acknowledged 18-year-old Krista Marzocca, who performs two roles, Kindred (relatives) and Doctor (teacher), who delivers the moral of the play at its conclusion.

Being in the play has helped Marzocca focus on her own concerns with material goods, especially clothes. "The play has made me aware of the things I have to do in my life to keep my eyes on God," she said.

These are precisely the kinds of lessons that Healy wished to encourage when he began the group. He hopes to be able to take "Everyman" into schools and churches. In addition to the performances in Wayland and Corning, the troupe will be traveling to New Jersey Aug. 18-20 to put on two more performances. At this point, he said, the group has no more scheduled performances, but is open to them.

Meanwhile, Healy is already beginning to look ahead to future productions. He is currently reading scripts to find plays that convey moral messages, and is planning to take courses that will prepare him to write original works.

Healy remains committed to developing the group and to making greater use of drama as a means of evangelization — a means contemporary Christians have neglected.

"Ultimately, I hope that the Marian Players would bring life to the church on whatever level that it can happen," Healy said. "If it doesn't bear fruit for life in the church, then I think we're wasting our time."



Richard Palumbo as Everyman (right), discloses his sins to Confession, played by Joe Wright (left), while Jennifer Spicka as Knowledge watches.

## Diocesan Appointments

Bishop Matthew H. Clark as approved the appointments of the following individuals by their respective religious superiors:

**Father John Colacino, CPPS**, from director of formation for the Atlantic Province of the Society of the Precious Blood to the doctoral program at St. Bernard's Institute and to assisting priest at St. Jerome's Church, East Rochester, effective Aug. 28.

**Father John Collins, CSSR**, from parochial vicar at Sacred Heart Church Baltimore, Md., to the staff at Notre Dame Retreat House, Canandaigua, effective, Aug. 1.

**Father Edwin Foley, CSSR**, from the staff at Notre Dame Retreat House, Canandaigua, to parochial vicar at St. Mary's Church, Annapolis, Md., effective Aug. 1.