

Kearney conquers

In a tightly fought defensive battle, Bishop Kearney's grid team squeaked by Newark 14-7 to take the Section 5 Class A football crown. Page 10.



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Christians work to save creation

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Gigi Carignan spends a lot of her time hiking through the gorges that decorate Ithaca, picking up after less courteous nature lovers.

Whenever she gets the chance, Carignan, a master's degree student at Cornell University, tries to clean up messes left behind by fellow humans who carelessly pollute the beautiful landscape. She travels to the gorges by foot, bicycle or bus, and scorns the idea of driving her own fossil-fuel powered vehicle.

"What we do today reflects what we'll do later on," Carignan maintains. "Later on" means "in heaven" for the Catholic student, who believes a pristine afterlife is unlikely for anyone who is unable to live an unpolluted life in the here and now.

Carignan is one of a growing number of Christians who consider concern for the environment to be directly linked to faith in the Lord.

"I just feel that the earth was given to us by God, and it's a gift that we shouldn't mess up," the student asserted. "If we love God, then we should love God's gift."

As broadcast and print media have reported again and again in recent years, "God's gift" is being handled rather poorly by an ungrateful child named humanity. Air pollution, toxic waste, ozone depletion, deforestation and a host of other environmental evils threaten to ultimately kill or permanently injure most of humanity within a time period defined by various nervous experts as 20 to 100 years.

Some Christians believe the world is being polluted into destruction because religious leaders have failed to instill a sense of planetary stewardship in their followers. A recent conference at Asbury First United Methodist Church in Rochester allowed a few hundred concerned Christians to gather and swap ideas about instilling just such a sense in their Protestant and Catholic brothers and sisters.

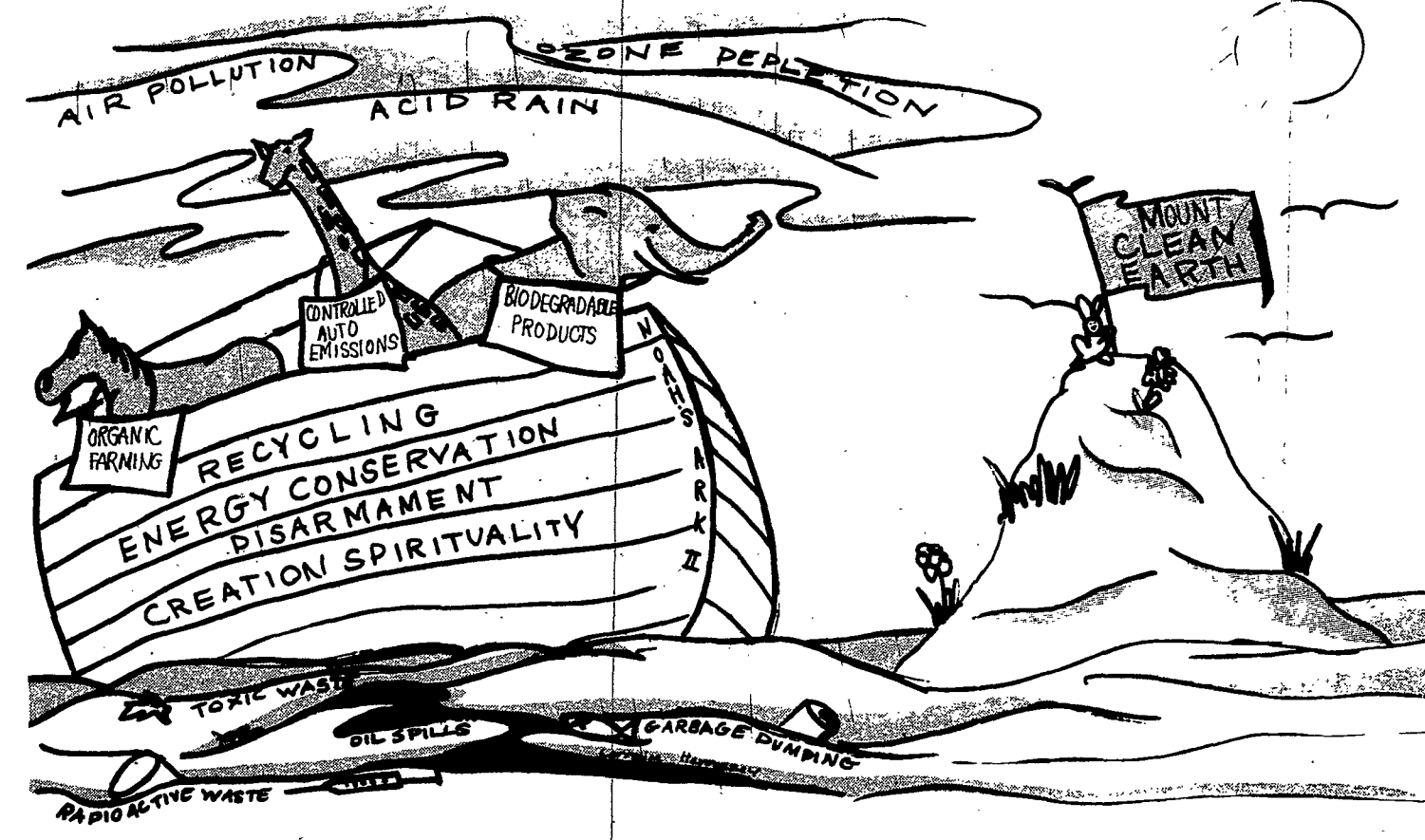
Running from Friday, Nov. 3, to Saturday, Nov. 4, the "Saving Creation Conference," featured several speakers — both Protestant and Catholic — including Dominican Father Richard Woods, a therapist at the Sexual Dysfunction Clinic of the Loyola Hospital Psychiatry Department and a teacher at the Loyola University Stritch School of Medicine in Chicago. Father Woods also edits *Spirituality Today*, and has been active in environmental issues since the 1970s.

The priest gave one of two keynote speeches on Nov. 3, and stressed that Christians, despite their alliance with the Industrial Revolution, can hearken back to earlier eras and the Bible itself to find a link between their faith and environmental concern.

Father Woods commented that early Egyptian and Irish Christians, most notably those who lived the monastic life, saw nature as a revelation of God's own self. He quoted from medieval Irish monastic poetry referring to the sea, the hills, the moors, and the land in general as reflective of God's beauty.

Irish stories often mention that such saints as Columban had animal friends who took on an almost human character, he noted. The Celtic attitude was that "the creature subsisted in God, and that God is created in the creature," he said.

The Celts carried this attitude with them when they spread the Gospel throughout



Europe following the collapse of the Roman Empire. "When the (barbarian tribes) rampaged, they burnt farms and picked areas clean," Father Woods said in an interview after the conference. "Europe was a wasteland for 500 years."

The missionaries preserved civilization as it collapsed around them, he said, and regenerated Europe through converting and teaching the barbarians, and restoring the land. Today, the priest claimed, the whole world is like Europe in the Dark Ages, except that today's barbarians include everyone from industrialists seeking short-term profits at the expense of the planet to terrorists who exploit the tensions of Third World poverty and repression.

Into this situation must go concerned people of all faiths who, like the Celtic missionaries of old, are charged with preserving all that is good about current civilization and restoring people's sense of unity with the planet, he said.

Christians have the particular duty of regaining their nature-oriented traditions, which go back as far as God's command in Genesis to cultivate and care for the Garden of Eden. "We were placed on earth to care for it, not to exploit it," Father Woods said.

The priest asserted that the church has been slow to recognize its role as a prophetic voice in the environmental movement, but he said Pope John Paul II's 1987 encyclical on social concerns — *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* — charts a healthy direction for the church. Although the encyclical deals primarily with the widening gap between the world's rich and poor, in Section IV, the pontiff does touch upon how development affects the environment.

"(T)he moral character of development," he wrote, "can(not) exclude respect for the beings which constitute the natural world ..." The Holy Father went on to state that such respect takes into account three considerations:

- That one cannot "use with impunity the different categories of beings ... simply as one wishes; without considering their place in the "cosmos."

- That natural resources "are limited, some are not ... renewable," and that us-

ing them as if they were unlimited "seriously endangers their availability not only for the present generation, but above all, for generations to come."

- That pollution is "the direct or indirect result of industrialization."

"The dominion granted to man by the Creator is not an absolute power," the pope concluded, expressing a sentiment shared by Father Woods. "Human good has to be understood in relation to life as a whole," the priest said.

Such phrases are fine things to contemplate when teaching at a university, but how can average Catholics, many of whom may have to work in environmentally destructive jobs, live out the pope's ideals?

In his Nov. 4 speech, Father Woods answered that simple lifestyle changes can be the starting point for environmental activism. He suggested that consumers start shopping for such environmentally sound products as garbage bags made out of biodegradable materials or reusable diapers made from cloth.

Avoid buying plastic containers when possible, the priest said, and persuade others not to buy such items as styrofoam cups that don't break down in landfills. Recycle glass and newspapers, mulch your leaves rather than throw them out, and once a year, plant a tree.

"It's better to be lighting candles than cursing the darkness," Father Woods said, holding up a re-usable canvas bag that he uses when he goes grocery shopping.

Some Catholics in the diocese are already lighting such candles through their own work and lifestyles. Three Catholics in Hornell founded a non-canonical Benedictine monastery in 1988 that practices much of what Father Woods preaches, and then some.

"Reverence for the sky and earth is part of our way of life," commented Patricia Brunk, a member of the Holy Trinity Community. "We do what we can in terms of the environment," she said, noting that the members have participated in rallies and letter-writing campaigns against the proposed location of a nuclear waste dump in the area.

She also said the Holy Trinity's water-

purification system doesn't use any chemicals to remove sulfur from the monastery's well water, and members raise food in an organic garden that uses marigolds — not pesticides — to deter pests that attack tomatoes.

Meanwhile, at Mount Saviour Monastery in Pine City, Brother Seraphim Winslow frequently takes walks through the acres of woods that make up much of the Benedictine community's land. The order harvests lumber carefully from its woods, the brother said, noting that the community sells some of the wood and uses the rest for fuel.

The monastery hires a contractor to weed out the sick and old trees from the young, harvesting the trees one by one, he said, rather than sectioning off areas of woods to be stripped clean.

While admitting that such a process is more expensive than stripping woods indiscriminately, "we're looking for, in terms of land usage, long term rather than short term," he remarked.

But the world doesn't have the long term in which to regain its environmental sanity, according to one Rochester resident whose recent action may point the way for some average Catholics to become involved in environmental action.

"I may be young, but I have concerns for our nation," LaCarla Page wrote in a recent letter to Democratic Congresswoman Louise Slaughter. "If something doesn't happen soon, we will be destroying our earth."

Slaughter was so impressed by the St. Monica School seventh-grader's letter that she read it before Congress on Nov. 9. "I thought her letter had merit and should be of interest to every American — young and old," the congresswoman said.

Page's letter reiterated many environmentalists' urgings that recycling should become a way of life for consumers. She urged action by the president and Congress to save the environment from further devastation.

"If we start now," the student pleaded, "we will have a better place to live."

Maybe even a Garden of Eden