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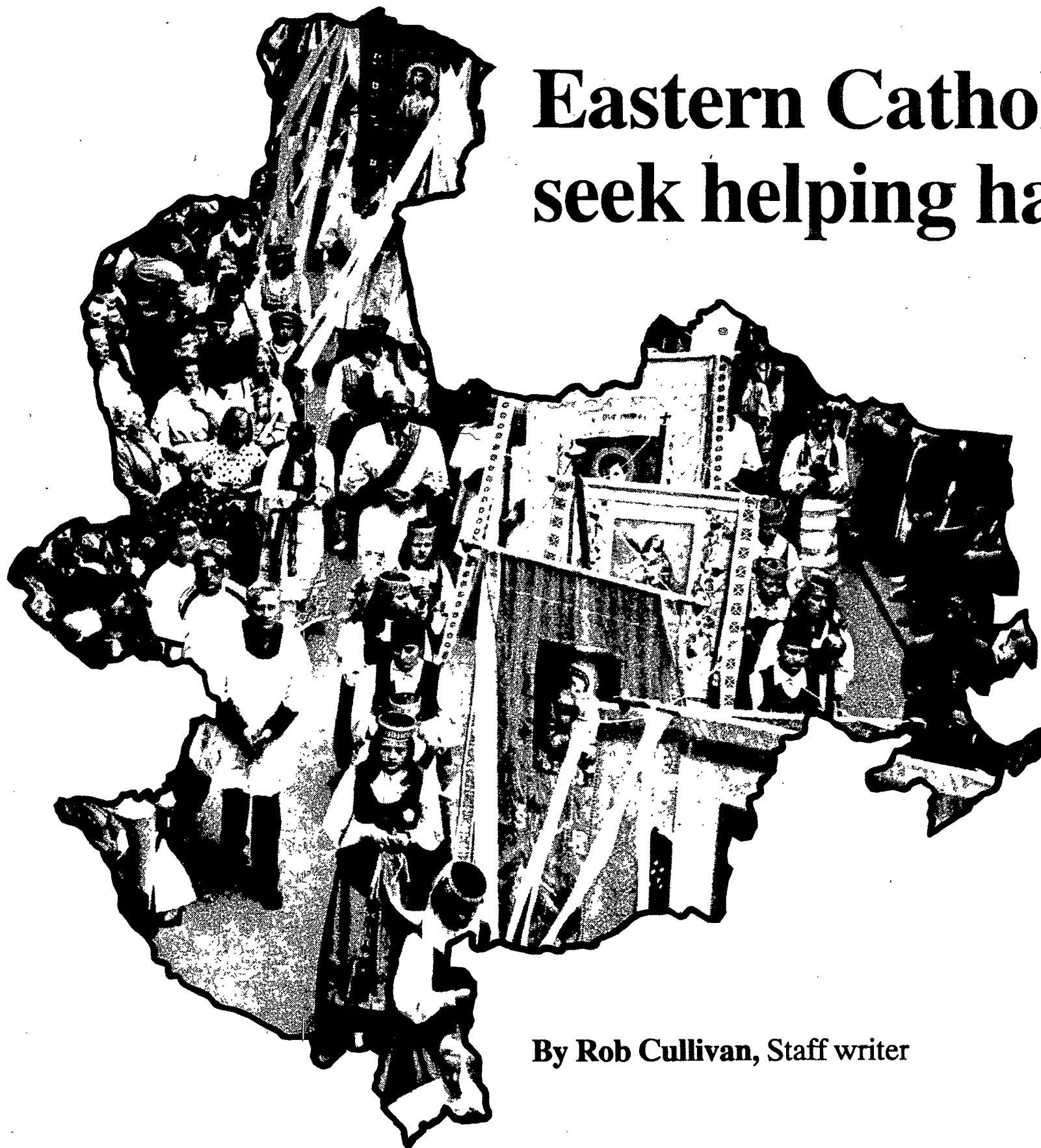
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Eastern Catholics seek helping hand



By Rob Cullivan, Staff writer

On his recent trip to Lithuania, Father Casimir Pugevicius witnessed a hunger among Catholics quite unlike anything he had seen in the United States.

"Everything from the Bible to comic books. They're absolutely famished for the written word," commented the executive director of Lithuanian Catholic Religious Aid, a charitable organization based in New York City.

In a recent phone interview with the *Catholic Courier*, the priest noted that the longing Lithuanian Catholics have for the written word parallels a variety of other hungers they experience for Western technology and medical supplies as well as information about the church in Western Europe and the United States.

Filling the material, mental and spiritual voids of Catholics in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union has become a priority for U.S. Catholics who long prayed for the day when the church would be de-

livered from communist intolerance and repression.

Now the Catholic Church in Eastern Europe stands respected as a friend of the people through past repression; heralded as an agent of non-violent revolutionary change; and envisioned as a moral force in the rebuilding of a new Eastern Europe.

"The church over there enjoys the position of being one of the most credible and looked-up-to institutions around," said Father R. George Sarauskas, director of the Washington, D.C.-based United States Catholic Conference's Office to Aid the Catholic Church in Central and Eastern Europe.

However, in a phone interview with the *Catholic Courier*, the priest also emphasized that the church in Eastern Europe needs vast amounts of material aid from Western Catholics.

"Sometimes the church is a bit overwhelmed and resources are limited," the director said, recalling his travels throughout the region and discussions with Catholic

leaders.

For Pope John Paul II, an alumnus of East European Catholicism, rebuilding cannot be done without Western help. But he wants this Western aid to be accompanied by a willingness to learn from the East European church's baptism by fire.

A native of Poland, the pope wants to rebuild the persecuted churches based on the faith formed by their suffering — not cloned from Western models.

This suffering produced "a special kind of theology of liberation," the pope said during an August, 1991 visit to Poland.

In Hungary a few days later, however, he also warned that East European churches no longer can remain isolated from the mainstream of Catholic life now that ties to the rest of the church have returned to normal.

Ideally, this rebuilding of East European churches will be a two-way street between East and West, according to Vatican offi-

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