

Marian conference decries secular humanism

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — For three days, the Rochester Marian Conference offered alternatives from what speakers portrayed as a largely immoral world.

"Catholics today need to be heroes — to go against the mainstream, to do what is not popular," emphasized Father Svetozar Kraljevic, OFM, in his final-day address, "The Church Today."

"The ideology that is destroying America today is secular humanism. The media is doing its darndest to condition the American mind into accepting abortion," shouted Father Albert J. Shamon during his opening-night speech, "Will God Bless America?"

The two priests were among a throng of noted guest lecturers who appeared at the Marian Conference, held July 22-24 at the Rochester Riverside Convention Center, 123 E. Main St.

The gathering marked the first large-scale Marian convention to ever be held in New York state. The weekend event attracted nearly 3,500 people from all over the country, according to Father Donald E. McCarthy, CSB, one of the conference's organizers.

As the title would indicate, many who turned out for this weekend of lectures, prayer and song are strongly devoted to



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer
Jane Gefell, a parishioner at St. Rita's Church in Webster, crowns a statue of Mary during the Marian Conference's opening ceremonies. Gefell, who uses a wheelchair, was assisted by a Knight of Columbus and a seminarian.

the Blessed Virgin Mary and the causes attached to her.

Father Shamon, a columnist for the *Catholic Courier*, feverishly espoused pro-life statements, saying, "Pro-choice is the choice to do evil; to commit murder. No one has that right. We have no more a right to do what we please with our body than we have to sell a house we rent."

Another topic addressed frequently during the conference was Medjugorje, where, in recent years, alleged visions of Mary have taken place and have prompted pilgrimages by worshipers from all over the world. In fact, Father Kraljevic is currently serving in war-torn Bosnia not far from Medjugorje.

Brilliant images of Mary and Jesus adorned the stage behind the speakers all weekend. Elaborate processions marked the opening ceremonies on Friday as well as at Sunday's two-hour closing Mass.

In addition, participants had the chance to purchase a variety of Marian-related wares from vendors who lined the convention-center hallways.

The conference's intensity was evident on the faces of many attendees, from adults kneeling before images of Mary to the conversion testimonies given by

speakers such as Irish tenor David Parkes.

Parkes noted that after visiting Medjugorje he was cured of Crohn's disease, a chronic inflammation of the digestive tract which he said had caused his weight to drop from more than 200 pounds to less than 100 in a matter of weeks.

Yet, Parkes added, an even greater miracle occurred when he decided to return to the Catholic Church and devote his professional life to his faith following his experience in Medjugorje.

"I couldn't be without the love of God in my life," said Parkes, who served as master of ceremonies for the Marian Conference.

Father McCarthy noted that organizers are hoping for a similar conference to be held in Rochester next year. If this does occur, he expects attendance to rise significantly.

"People had no concept of what this was, and now they're aware of it," said Father McCarthy, who also serves as parochial vicar at St. Rita's Church in Webster. "It's a real time of spiritual renewal and prayer."

"It all came off so beautifully. All the preparation and all the nervousness was worth it," remarked Arthur J. Harris, president of the Knights of Columbus Finger Lakes Chapter, which co-sponsored the event along with the Rochester Center for Peace.

Teachers criticize diocesan, parish officials over firings

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

CANANDAIGUA — Two St. Mary's School teachers whose contracts were not renewed for the upcoming year severely criticized school, parish and diocesan officials in statements to the school committee during a July 25 meeting.

Peg Hainey, a former part-time art teacher, and Diane Wilcox, a language arts teacher who spent 26 years at the school, were among the six teachers not rehired for the 1994-95 school year at St. Mary's, 16 Gibson St. Both teachers have complained that they were given no explanation why their contracts were not renewed.

All six teachers June 17 were informed of the end of their career at the school by Laurie J. Frykholm, principal; Sister Virginia Steinwachs, SSJ, diocesan assistant superintendent of human resources; and Sister Margaret Mancuso, SSJ, assistant superintendent for instruction and staff development.

Hainey placed much of the blame for her fate at the feet of the school's former principal, Sister Alice Marie Kurtz, SSJ, currently on sabbatical in Minnesota. Sister Kurtz left her position at the school last winter and was replaced by Frykholm.

"During the last two years of Sister Alice's tenure, I was made to feel an outsider and my personal dignity was diminished by being characterized as overbearing and unacceptable to others because of my enthusiasm and love of art," Hainey said.

She also noted that she was excluded from one faculty meeting concerning the future of the school's junior high grades because she was not Catholic. She added that Sister Kurtz considered any questioning at faculty meetings to be "aggressive," but that Sister Kurtz never informed her verbally or in writing about how or why she should change.

When contacted in Minnesota for comment, Sister Kurtz declined to speak to the *Catholic Courier* about the teachers' statements, citing concerns about

confidentiality in administrative matters.

Frykholm, Sisters Steinwachs and Kurtz, and St. Mary's pastor, Father Walter L. Wainwright, all declined to comment on the teachers' statements when contacted by the *Courier*.

Hainey did not spare Frykholm the criticism she heaped on Sister Kurtz.

"Miss Frykholm, you perpetuated the situation and allowed yourself to become a puppet in order to vindicate Sister Alice's perceptions and vendettas," Hainey said.

Hainey also criticized Father Wainwright, whom she approached last fall to discuss the declining level of relations between Sister Kurtz and faculty members.

"Father Wainwright, you betrayed me," she said. "Interestingly, in the last weeks of school, you were unable to look me in the eye ... What are you hiding? Are you embarrassed?"

Hainey also said Sister Steinwachs acted "inappropriately" during a meeting between the two women when the assistant superintendent asked Hainey what she thought of her fellow teachers.

In her statement to the school committee, Wilcox also expressed bewilderment that her contract was not renewed. She noted that Frykholm had informed her earlier in the year that she would like Wilcox to continue working at the school.

In fact, as late as June 9, only eight days before being told she was not going to have her contract renewed, Wilcox claimed Frykholm asked her which classroom she wanted for next school year.

Wilcox also noted that in all her meetings with Sister Steinwachs prior to the June 17 meeting, "no indication was given of my impending termination."

On Tuesday, July 24, Rich Colosi, chairman of the parish council, sent a copy of an open letter from the council to the *Courier* by facsimile. The letter outlined various steps taken by the council regarding the teachers' issue.

The letter said the council would inform the teachers of their right to use an already established diocesan appeals procedure to pursue their grievances.

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