

DIOCESAN NEWS

Visiting sister advocates for planet

By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

BRIGHTON — Sister of Charity Paula Gonzalez bemoans the widening gap between the rich and the poor, and estimates that the richest 20 percent of the world (including most of the United States) use 83 percent of the world's resources.

"The American way of life is an exercise in over-consumption," she said after a full-day workshop April 18 at the Sisters of Mercy Motherhouse. "We'd need two additional planets if everybody lived like the United States and Canada. Another way of putting it, is the planet can't afford us."

Sister Gonzalez, an environmentalist with national recognition for creative energy solutions, spoke on, "How We Live and Act as Citizens of the Earth." The talk was one of several she gives around the country, most recently in conjunction with Earth Day, April 23.

Sister Gonzalez, who lives in a chicken coop she converted into a solar home in Cincinnati, Ohio, can as easily discuss how to reduce meat in one's diet as she can discuss how to install photovoltaic panels in a building, while explaining the farm acreage and energy saved, respectively.

At times she seems without mercy when critiquing consumption.

"We drive around in cars, one person per car, and now they're getting bigger and using more gas," she said. "If you purchase a car that gets 20 miles to the gallon instead of 40, you are choosing to make twice as much global warming."

While she might make an over-consuming American feel guilty, that isn't her aim.

"I absolved them all for guilt," she said, waving her arms where 50 Sisters of Mercy had just sat with her and left resolving to change eating and consuming habits. "You can't help being born in a rich world. We have to change the feeling of guilt, which is paralyzing. ...What you do instead is take on responsibility, out of a sense of ethics."

She urges that instead of using resources and creating waste, people recognize their part in the earth's ecology and re-create a "badly-needed sense of awe and reverence" for God's creation.

Why "drag out" Styrofoam and paper for coffee and doughnuts after Mass, she asked, when most churches have reusable cups and plates? As for her, she carries her own mug and cloth napkin to meetings.

Why do people flip on lights as soon as they enter rooms, she asked, no matter how much natural light is available?

Sister Gonzalez, 65, who holds advanced degrees in general and cellular physiology from the Catholic University of America,



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Sister of Charity Paula Gonzalez, right, an educator and environmentalist, enjoys a break with Sister Anne Curtis, RSM, during a workshop at the Sisters of Mercy Motherhouse in Brighton April 18.

taught for about 20 years, mostly at the College of Mount St. Joseph in Cincinnati. She also serves as an energy consultant around and outside the country. "I am normally remodeling the planet, trying to get a larger crew," she said.

To "remodel the planet," one doesn't have to convert a four-car garage into an EarthConnection center — as she did near Mount St. Joseph. The center models resource efficiency and is a meeting place to educate and motivate the public to "live lightly" on the earth, to conserve and appreciate resources.

The center adopted a motto from Sister Elizabeth Ann Seton, founder of the Sisters of Charity: "Live simply, that others may simply live."

"Everybody knows our environmental problems are enormous," Sister Gonzalez said. "But they assume they're too big."

It is important for people to learn, Sister Gonzalez said, and to work with such groups as Bread for the World, Food for the Poor, the Heifer Project International — which supplies families with the beginning of a herd.

"If you want to start doing something about any environmental or justice and

peace issue, the most important thing is to pick any one," she said. One is naturally linked to another, she said.

Also, she advised:

- Support ongoing movements by writing political officials, joining boycotts of certain foods and volunteering at a soup kitchen or food bank.

- Eat less meat, adopt a hungry family through the Heifer Project or locally, avoid products that are over-packaged, over-preserved, out-of-season, and produced by workers treated unjustly. Use economical cooking — a toaster oven, microwave or solar oven, for example.

One dollar of every \$11 spent at the grocery store goes for packaging, she said, and 90-95 percent of heat spent simmering food actually heats the room. By reducing by 10 percent the meat each person in the United States eats, 100 million people could be adequately fed, she said. Twelve people can be fed off the land it takes to provide one meat-centered diet, she added.

- Grow anything, even if it's zucchini one has to give away.

Sister Gonzalez' talk was one effort to follow up on the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas vision statement, amended in 1995 to include their intention: to "act in harmony and interdependence with all creation."

Sister Anne Curtis, RSM, justice coordinator for the Mercy Rochester community, said, "She really builds a case for what is going on with the earth and environment, from a scientific and theological point of view."

She noted the local Mercy Sisters have begun an Environmental Study Group to help direct their community. Profits from shirts stating "Have Mercy on the Earth," now sold at the gift shop at the motherhouse, will support its projects, she said.

However, Sister Gonzalez' emphasis on reducing meat consumption came at a fairly inopportune time: On Saturday, April 25, the Sisters of Mercy will hold the annual roast beef supper they've sponsored since 1927.

Father Hart chosen to be moderator

GATES — Father Joseph A. Hart, pastor of Our Lady Queen of Peace in Brighton, has been named a vicar general of the Diocese of Rochester and the moderator of the Diocesan Pastoral Center, effective June 30.

The diocese announced Father Hart's appointment in a press release April 23.

Father Hart will replace the outgoing moderator, Father John M. Mulligan, named the diocese's first moderator in 1988. Father Mulligan will retain the title of vicar general and will continue to assist Bishop Matthew H. Clark in some aspects of administration, the press release stated.

Father Hart will take a leave of absence from both his pastoral duties at his parish as well as his position as an assistant professor at St. Bernard's Institute. He will continue to reside at Our Lady Queen of Peace as well as perform sacramental duties there, he said in an interview with the *Catholic Courier*. Sister Jacquelyn Reichart, RSM, the parish's senior pastoral associate, will become the parish's administrator, he said.

In the press statement, Bishop Clark spoke highly of Father Hart, who celebrates 25 years as a priest this year (see "Milestones" supplement, Page 8a).

"Father Hart brings to this ministry an exciting combination of theological and pastoral skills," Bishop Clark stated. "I admire his sound judgment, his organizational skills and his ability to call forth the gifts of others in creative ways."

The bishop also noted that Father Hart directed the Diocesan Synod from 1990 to 1995, a fact that Father Hart said would aid him in running the pastoral center. He noted that having already worked in the pastoral center and on the Synod gave him a good knowledge of the diocesan church's "larger aspects" and "vision." A diocesan advisory committee selected Father Hart from among a pool of more than 50 candidates for the moderator position. In the press release, Frank Stotz, the committee's chairman, stated that Hart possessed "people skills, administrative talent and a sense of mission of the diocese."

In addition to having taught at St. Bernard's Institute since 1981, Father Hart served on the faculty of St. Bernard's Seminary from 1976 to 1981, and as an assistant pastor at St. Anne Church in Rochester from 1975 to 1976.

Father Hart said he was pleased with being selected moderator and looked forward to the future.

"While it is with regret that I leave parish and classroom behind, nevertheless, I'm delighted to be of service to the bishop and the diocese," he concluded. "With God's help, I will try to build on the solid foundation which Father Mulligan has laid over the past decade."

— Rob Cullivan

Recognizing

* **Msgr. William DuBois**, of the Diocese of St. Petersburg, is celebrating 50 years as a priest. A Rochester native, he attended St. Bernard's Seminary and was ordained May 6, 1948.

* The Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Rochester held their annual Math 24 competition April 7 at St. Margaret Mary School, Irondequoit. The winners were: **Benjamin Gardner**, St. Charles Borromeo School, fourth grade; **Phillip DeLaus**, Nazareth Hall, fifth grade; **Laura Holden**, St. Charles Borromeo School, sixth grade; **Lauren Taddeo**, Holy Cross School, seventh grade; and **Adia Hinds**, Nazareth Middle School, eighth grade.

* The Diocese of Rochester has announced the winners of the 1998 Consistent Life Ethic Vita Awards, given in recognition of their activities to promote life: **Linda Crowe**, Corning-Painted Post Catholic Community; **Amy and Bob Dorscheid**, Holy Spirit, Webster; **Father James Hewes**, Newman Community, State University College at Geneseo; **Sister Barbara Lum, SSJ**, Corpus Christi, Rochester; and **Donald Peters**, St. Mary's, Waterloo.

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