

Editor's comment

We have no excuse

Francie Healy

Where were you when they massacred the babies and toddlers, the moms and dads and grandparents? What were you doing when they killed so many families the bodies were piled several layers high and taken away by backhoe?

This is what young people from the Diocese of Ontario wanted to know about the church and the genocide in Rwanda. Through Bishop George Bruce, they sent their question to the House of Bishops: Where were you, and why didn't you do something about it?

Not only the bishops need to answer the question. Each of us must ask it of ourselves.

It was April, 1994. In one part of the world, it was Rwanda. In one part of the world, it was Canada.

In our part, we were eating at McDonalds. We were choosing shampoo from hundreds lined on drugstore shelves. We were getting ready to plant our gardens. We were buying patio furniture. We were watching sitcoms on TV. We were discussing the latest diet fads. We were going to dinner parties, and listening to music, and taking strolls downtown in the evenings.

In Rwanda's part, there were rivers of blood and babies without parents, and children who learned how to kill. There were a million bodies and horror, and a world that turned its back.

We hardly remember what we bought for our gardens that year. And we have practically forgotten the slaughter of people we didn't even try to know. People like Lt. Gen. Roméo Dallaire (see story, front page) and journalist Hugh McCullum (*The Angels have Left Us*, WCC Publications, Geneva) try not to let us forget about the nightmare that also became their own.

They were there. They saw it. At times they lost their sanity over it. They were not buying toothpaste for the whitest teeth, or watching reruns on TV, or stressing over the right colour of carpet for the dining room. They were in the midst of one of the world's massive, shocking, incomprehensible tragedies.

They are still telling us what happened. We have to listen. We have to pay attention to them and to others like Stephen Lewis (see

page 1) because it's happening again. It's happening with AIDS in Africa. It's happening in Darfur.

We live in the most information-accessible time in history. We have no excuse not to know.

We can dress ourselves up in brand name clothes; we can entertain ourselves; we can shop 'til we drop; we can lounge around in front of the TV; we can ponder our navels. We can fret about shrinking collection plates, or the state of the stock market, or the price of gasoline, or the best place to get a haircut.

Or we can read. And pay attention. And learn from an increasingly-aware young generation. And then, with eyes and ears wide open, begin to understand.

We can't all go to the killing fields, as Roméo Dallaire, Hugh McCullum and Stephen Lewis have done. But we can hear them with our intellects and our resolve and our anger so we will at least, in whatever way we can, be there with those who suffer profoundly and obscenely.

"I hope," said Hugh McCullum, "someone is listening."