

DEMON ROAST



JACK NEELY/BUTLER EAGLE

On Sunday evening, members of the Harvest Assembly of God Church in Penn Township sing songs as they burn books, videos and CDs that they have judged offensive to their God.

Penn Twp. church sentences evil items to roaring bonfire

By **DARLENE WHITE NATALE**
Eagle Focus Editor

PENN TWP — Hung from the coat rack in the vestibule was a sign that read "BURN BOX — DEMON ROAST." Below it were boxes that churchgoers had filled with items they thought should be destroyed in a fire.

The 45-member Harvest Assembly of God Church on Brownsdale Road held a book burning on Sunday night with about 40 church members.

The burn boxes held videos, including at least three copies of Disney's Hercules, Pinocchio and Aladdin. "The Phenomenon," "The Rock," "Ace Ventura," "The Lost World" and "The Dragonslayer" were also destined for the flames.

The Rev. George Bender said they didn't get anything extremely far out except for this: A bound copy of "The Scripture of God — The Third Testament" and a brochure on witchcraft and voodoo.

"The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway" were toast, as were several Kahil Gilbran books, including "The Prophet."

"Touched By An Angel — Stories from the TV Show," a book "Defending Pornography," another on Leonardo DiCaprio, a baby doll, and carved wooden containers were tossed into the fire as the group sang songs of praise.

There were brochures and literature from other

faiths, including the Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons, which Bender considers cults because they believe in "false" gods. Music CDs including AC/DC, Red Hot Chili peppers, and Bruce Springsteen also were sacrificed.

The evening began with a six-piece youth band accompanying a choir as it sang "Father of Creation" and other hymns. Worshipers swayed in rhythm to the music.

Bender said the genesis of the book burning was the youth group studying the book of Revelation as it deals with idolatry.

Bender explained they were there to tell about Jesus, not to destroy other people's property.

"We believe literally in what the word of God says," Harvest Assembly member Dodi Steen said, clapping and swinging to the music. "I see it (book burning) as a scriptural exercise. Biblically sound."

Bender said a police officer once told him you can tell you have the right suspect by giving it the duck test. If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, talks like a duck and smells like a duck — it's a duck.

"Harry Potter is a duck! The literature is sorcery, wicca and witchcraft. It's still a duck," Bender said.

Lisa Rebman has been attending Harvest Assem-

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bly for about a year. She said Bender never told them they had to burn items, but he offered the invitation.

She said her family doesn't celebrate Halloween because it honors demons. She said she brought some old music she and her husband had from before they found God. She said she would destroy REM "Monster" and some new-age books.

Ken Reilly, who assumed the duty of keeper of the fire while the others sang inside the church, said there were bags lying near the pyre that included American Indian lore and Mickey Mouse as a sorcerer.

"It plants the seed in the wrong field," Reilly said of the Mickey Mouse tale. He explained they believe in the 10 commandments and that they should not honor false gods.

Before the congregation left the church to begin burning the materials, Bender told them their enemies would try to make it look like they are doing something bad.

"We are doing something to honor you, Lord!" Bender exclaimed to affirmations of his vocal congregation.

Joel Brady, 17, stood singing by the fire with other members of the youth group, but he didn't bring anything to feed the flames.

"I get rid of everything. I don't wait," said Brady, who attends the Living Word Christian School.

Rick Stawecki, 25, of Mars, brought his Pearl Jam, AC/DC and Bruce Springsteen CDs to burn. He said many of these artists sing about and "do" drugs.

There was no idol smashing as Bender had called for in his flyer announcing the event. He did say that anything that didn't burn would be consigned to the garbage hauler.

The lone dissenter was a Butler High School student Shelby Baker.

"I'm totally against book burning. I don't feel they are accomplishing anything," Baker said. She just completed her senior paper on censorship and opposes book burning.

She said she was surprised to see them burning a Santa Claus doll, too.

"I think their actions are going against what they say about acceptance. Everyone should have the right to choose," Baker said. She said she was shocked at the idea of book burning but was polite as Bender introduced himself to her.

As the youth group played and sang "Father of Creation" Dave Sinz said the 15-member group is a great bunch of kids.

"This (book burning) is a symbolic thing — we are not nuts," Sinz said.

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