

# Nelson Mandela commemorates World AIDS Day

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) - Nelson Mandela, the former president of a country now beset by a deadly AIDS epidemic, commemorated World AIDS Day Saturday by urging South Africa's youth to fight the disease and accept those who suffer from it.

"There is no difference whatsoever between somebody who is HIV-positive and myself," Mandela said. "We should approach people who are HIV-positive. We must give them love and support and not marginalize them."

The plea for commitment and compassion by one of the world's greatest icons was echoed around the developing world, where AIDS continues to take a mounting toll.

Since the disease was first reported two decades ago, an estimated 40 million people worldwide are now HIV positive, 28.1 million of them in sub-Saharan Africa, figures released by UNAIDS this week show. The agency expects AIDS to kill 3 million people this year.

An estimated 4.7 million South Africans - one in nine - are HIV positive, more than in any other country, and President Thabo Mbeki's government has come under fire for its haphazard approach toward fighting the epidemic.

"Nothing threatens us more today than HIV/Aids," said Mandela.

In Johannesburg, religious leaders, trade unionists and activists held an interfaith service and demanded that AIDS be declared a national emergency.

In neighboring Zimbabwe, where AIDS now claims about 300 lives a day, drum



Archbishop Desmond Tutu (L) and former President Nelson Mandela respond to questions at a meeting to commemorate World Aids Day in KTC township near Cape Town, December 1. Tutu told the gathering of youths that the best way to tackle the disease was to abstain from sex, but if that were not possible to practice safe sex.

majorettes marched through the capital Harare to raise AIDS awareness, while about 500 people attended a rally where officials urged men to practice safe sex.

In an address at the Vatican, Pope John Paul II offered spiritual solace to AIDS sufferers and urged researchers to keep hunting for a cure.

He did not mention his opposition to the use of condoms to combat AIDS, but urged health workers to tell AIDS sufferers Christ

would help them.

While many World AIDS Day functions were marked by stark statistics and fears of worse to come, a few countries proclaimed small victories in their struggles against the epidemic.

Cambodia's government trumpeted its success in reducing HIV infection among pregnant women from 3.2 percent in 1997 to 2.3 percent at the end of last year.

In Sudan, the government launched a

massive AIDS awareness campaign, ending years of silence about a disease spreading fast in the war-ravaged African country.

But there were ominous warnings from China and Russia.

"At present, the AIDS situation is trending toward rapid increase," Chinese Health Minister Zhang Wenkang said in remarks carried in state newspapers.

Government experts estimate more than 600,000 Chinese citizens were infected with HIV/AIDS by the end of 2000, and say newly reported infections have skyrocketed in recent months.

In Moscow, the head of UNAIDS warned that millions of people could die of AIDS over the next decade unless an effective prevention campaign was mounted.

"All will depend on which position the leadership of the country takes," the newspaper Vremya quoted Peter Piot as saying.

While 163,000 HIV cases have been officially registered in Russia since January 1987, many cases go unreported and some estimate up to a million people are infected.

Colorful, catchy AIDS awareness campaigns were in full swing around the world Saturday.

In Hanoi, Vietnam, there was a parade of pedicabs decorated with condoms, while Bangladesh issued a commemorative stamp and held street rallies and public discussions. "I care... Do you?" reads the stamp, which depicts a sick man and a pregnant woman.

In Stockholm, Sweden, about 300 people attended a concert and candlelight vigil in memory of AIDS victims.

## Advent

(Continued from Page 3)  
trust in God, like Mary."

"The lesson of the Blessed Mother is a story of hope and of faith," says Boggs McDonald. "Especially in our country, when we're faced with economic challenges and other serious problems, we have her example of commitment and belief."

The senator, while no doubt putting his faith in God

to bring peace, ultimately, to the world, is nevertheless hoping mightily that humans will speed the process along, sooner, rather than later. Said the pragmatic Neal, "What a person can hope for is that good sense will reign."

Neal's use of "hope" and "sense" in that sentence brings to mind a definition of hope, offered by a politician but quoted in a homily deliv-

ered by one the most insightful priests in the Diocese of Las Vegas.

"Hope is not the same thing as optimism," Rev. Joe Anesse told his congregation. "It is not the conviction that things will be alright, but certainty that somehow they will make sense, no matter how they turn out."

Last Sunday, the first of Advent, and throughout the

past week at St. James, attention has been focused on attaining peace within the heart, this Sunday the focus becomes the work of establishing peace in the family. A week later it will shift to achieving peace in the community, which, on the fourth and last Sunday of Advent, will reflect on the challenge of bringing peace to the world.

Even as violence within the human family reveals itself from the Middle East to our East Coast, Blackburn asks St. James parish to consider, "How can we be peacemakers?" His question embodies the essence of Advent.

"I think it's special this year," says Anesse, and, returning to that definition, his reason becomes clear. Unlike years past, Advent has to

feel different this year, "Because," said Father Joe, "I have to get meaning and sense out of what's going on."

Father Michael, pretty insightful himself, noted something else that is virtuous, related to peacemaking, and is therefore related to Advent. "Justice fits into this," said Father Michael. "If you want peace, you must have justice."

## AIDS

(Continued from Page 1)

"Lean on Me" and "I Believe I Can Fly" floated into the evening air.

"We don't need to be ashamed of this," said Penny Jackson, organizer of the event and director of Counseling Services Plus Inc., an organization that provides counseling and assistance to people with AIDS. Counseling Services Plus also includes a nonprofit component, Counseling Awareness Rehabilitation Education (CARE), which functions in the heart of the Enterprise Zone to provide counseling and education services to low income individuals right where the need is greatest. Counseling Services Plus is located at 1240 W. Owens, #3, and can be reached by calling 647-9325.

Fighting AIDS in our Community Today (FACT), an organization that also supports people with HIV and AIDS, was also represented at the event. FACT is based in the Enterprise Health Center and provides support to youth, men and women who are affected by AIDS.

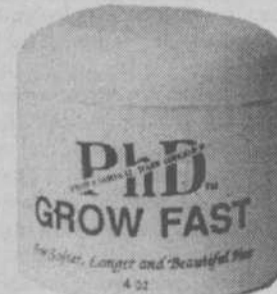
There is an old enemy in the midst of us that is killing Americans in large numbers - an enemy that we cannot afford to forget.

This enemy is one we can defeat if we stand together to make a difference.

An estimated 900,000 people in the United States are living with HIV or AIDS, and half of all new HIV infections are among young Americans under the age of 25. Every hour two more young Americans contract HIV. Why? Because too many of our young people are engaging in high-risk behaviors such as unprotected sexual activity and sharing needles for drug injection. Around the world, over 36 million people are estimated to be living with HIV or AIDS and nine out of ten of them don't know it. We all have the responsibility to make a difference.

"The child who cries is every child. The women weakened and tried is every mother, wife, sister, daughter. The man is every father, son and brother... We welcome into our community and our church all persons whose lives have been touched by HIV and AIDS. We say to all: 'You are welcome here.'" (Cathie Lyons, HIV/AIDS Ministries Network, December 1990 issue of HIV/AIDS Ministries Network Focus Paper)

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