

Dear Pastor/Parish Coordinator:

As Episcopal Moderator for the National Catholic AIDS Network (NCAN), I write on the occasion of World AIDS Day, December 1, 2003, to acknowledge the tragic impact of HIV/AIDS on people throughout this country and the world, but most especially on the respective racial and ethnic communities for which the Church has particular concern. This annual observance of World AIDS Day was established in 1988 by the World Summit of Ministers of Health on AIDS, a conference attended by 140 countries. The occasion provides an opportunity for governments, national AIDS programs, churches, community organizations, and individuals to show the importance of an appropriate response to HIV/AIDS that is grounded in justice, charity, and solidarity.

On the weekend closest to this World AIDS Day, the Church calls upon Catholics worldwide to mark the beginning of Advent. As we begin the season that recalls Jesus' entry into the world as the Light in all Darkness, it seems fitting that Catholics be asked to join their prayers with others in the hope that this pandemic be ended. I hope that every parish will become engaged in the education of parishioners about HIV/AIDS by calling attention to the World AIDS Day event during the weekend of November 29–30, 2003. Thus it is suggested that, during Masses on this particular weekend, petitions be included in the Prayers of the Faithful to seek an end to this epidemic and for nonjudgmental acceptance of those infected or otherwise affected by HIV. In a similar manner, homilists might include reference to the pandemic of HIV/AIDS and to the World AIDS Day event within their reflections on the readings for the First Sunday of Advent. So, too, clergy, religious, and faithful parishioners are encouraged to support and become active in organizations that provide care for people with AIDS. Additional information is available on the Web sites of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Secretariats for African American Catholics and Hispanic Affairs (www.usccb.org/hispanicaffairs, www.usccb.org/saac) and of the National Catholic AIDS Network (www.ncan.org).

This year's World AIDS Day theme is "“Live and Let Live.” The event focuses on addressing the stigma and discrimination that people living with HIV/AIDS face daily. These factors are among the most serious obstacles to halting the further spread of the disease, and must be addressed on an urgent basis by all in the world community. People who fear shame and discrimination are less likely to seek HIV testing or to seek access to medical care once they learn of their infection. The Church is uniquely positioned to address these issues and offer advice, hope, and compassion to people living with HIV/AIDS, their families, and friends, and in keeping with the prophetic inspiration of our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, to advocate for more just treatment and access to medication on behalf of all living with HIV. Most recently, the Holy Father cited the importance of the Church's involvement in HIV/AIDS education and care by saying:

Worthy of particular mention are the various HIV/AIDS initiatives that, in complete harmony with the Church's teaching, seek to assist those affected by this disease and to keep the public duly informed about it. (Address to Bishops of Uganda during their *ad limina* visit, September 22, 2003)

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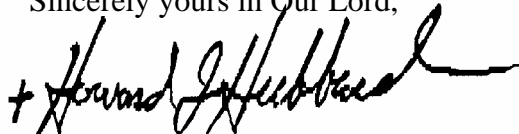
of Catholic Bishops



I am pleased that the National Catholic AIDS Network enjoys a close working relationship with the Secretariats for Hispanic Affairs and for African American Catholics of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops as we strive together to overturn health disparities in communities of color. These offices have developed theologically and culturally appropriate information resources about ways to respond to HIV/AIDS, with a focus on value-based education and compassionate care for people living with the disease. To illustrate the suffering caused by HIV/AIDS in communities of color, statistics provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and The Leadership Campaign on AIDS show that, in 2001, African Americans made up half of all AIDS cases, and Hispanics accounted for 20 percent, though they constitute only 12 and 14 percent of the nation's population, respectively. Additional information on the effects of HIV/AIDS and liturgical resources are included with this letter.

I pray that, by active participation in World AIDS Day events and by including this theme in our weekend liturgies on November 29–30, Catholics will become more aware of the responsibility to make sound decisions, in keeping with Catholic moral teaching, that will prevent the further spread of HIV, eliminate stigma and discrimination toward those infected, and help this country shape a future that is free of this epidemic.

Sincerely yours in Our Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Howard J. Hubbard". The signature is written in a cursive style and is preceded by a small cross symbol.

Most Rev. Howard J. Hubbard
Episcopal Moderator
National Catholic AIDS Network