

**MESSAGE OF CARDINAL JAVIER LOZANO BARRAGÁN
ON THE OCCASION OF THE WORLD AIDS DAY**

December 1, 2005

The World Day against AIDS of this year, organized by UNAIDS with the slogan "Stop AIDS: Keep the promise", seeks to call everyone, and in particular those who occupy positions of responsibility in the field of HIV/AIDS, to a renewed and conscious commitment to the lasting prevention of the spread of this pandemic and to care for those afflicted by it, especially in poor countries, in order to stem and invert the trend towards the growing spread of infection by HIV/AIDS.

The Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care joins with other national and international organizations, and in particular UNAIDS, which every year organizes a world campaign of combating AIDS, so that this planetary evil, which has brought about a global crisis, can be met with an action that is equally global and united.

The adherence in 2001 of Heads of State and representatives of Governments to the Declaration of commitment to the struggle against HIV/AIDS was an important moment of affirming awareness and political commitment at a world level in favour of a strong, global and decisive reaction and response by the international community.

The epidemiological situation of HIV/AIDS continues to rouse great concern. It is estimated that in 2005 the number of people living with AIDS was 40.3 million, of whom 2.3 million were minors under the age of 15. Year by year the number of people infected by this disease continues to grow.

In 2005, 4.9 million people contracted the HIV virus, of whom 700,000 were minors under the age of 15, and in 2005 3.1 million people died of AIDS, of whom 570,000 were young people under the age of 15. HIV/AIDS continues to sow death in all the countries of the world.

The best cure is prevention to avoid infection by HIV/AIDS, which we should remember is transmitted through the triple route of blood, transmission from mother to child and sexual contact.

As regards transfusions and other forms of contact with the blood of an infected person, today such infection has been notably reduced. Despite this fact, the very greatest attention should be paid to avoid this pathway of infection, especially in centres that deal with transfusions and during surgical operations.

We may thank the Lord that contagion from mother to child is strongly controlled by suitable drugs. Prevention in this field must be intensified through the provision of suitable medication to sero-positive mothers, especially by public bodies in the various countries of the world.

The third pathway of infection - sexual transmission - still remains the most important. This is greatly fostered by a kind of pansexual culture that devalues sexuality, reducing it to mere pleasure without any further meaning.

Radical prevention in this field must come from a correct conception and practice of sexuality, where sexual activity is understood in its deep meaning as a total and absolute expression of the fecund giving of love. This totality leads us to the exclusiveness of its exercise in marriage, which is unique and indissoluble. Secure prevention in this field thus lies in the intensification of the solidity of the family. This is the profound meaning of the Sixth Commandment of the law of God, which constitutes the fulcrum of the authentic prevention of AIDS in the field of sexual activity.

Faced with the difficult social, cultural and economic situation in which many countries find themselves, there can be no doubt that a defence and promotion of health is required that is a sign of the unconditional love of everyone, in particular for the poorest and the weakest, and which meets the human needs of every individual and the community.

As a result, those laws that do not take into sufficient consideration the equal distribution of conditions of health for everyone must be reformed.

Health is a good in itself and we can say that "there weighs upon it a social mortgage". Thus, health must be assured to all the inhabitants of the earth, and studies must be engaged in so that resources are

used to achieve health for everyone by ensuring the basic care and treatment that are still denied to the majority of the population of the world.

The right to the defence of health must, however, be matched by the duty to implement forms of behaviour and to follow lifestyles that are directed to defending health and to reject those that compromise health.

The Catholic Church continues to make her contribution both as regards prevention and in caring for people afflicted by HIV/AIDS and their families at the level of medical care and assistance and at the social, spiritual and pastoral levels.

A total of 26.7 percent of centres for the provision of care in relation to HIV/AIDS in the world are Catholic based. Local Churches, religious institutions and lay associations have promoted very many projects and programmes dealing with training and education, prevention and assistance, care and the pastoral accompanying of sick people, with love, a sense of responsibility and a spirit of charity.

At a practical level, on the basis of the information that comes from the various local Churches and Catholic institutions in the world, the actions that are engaged in the field of AIDS may be categorized in the following way: the promotion of campaigns of sensitization, programmes of prevention and health-care education, support for orphans, the distribution of medicaments and food, home care, the creation of hospitals, centres and therapeutic communities that concentrate their work around the provision of care and assistance for people afflicted by HIV/AIDS, working with governments, care in prisons, courses of catechesis, the creation of systems of help through Internet, and the establishment of support groups for sick people.

Flanking this inestimable and praiseworthy endeavour, on 12 September 2004 Pope John Paul II created the "Good Samaritan" Foundation, which was entrusted to the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care and subsequently confirmed by Pope Benedict XVI, in order to bring economic help, thanks to the donations that are received, to the sick people who are most in need in the world, and in particular to the victims of HIV/AIDS.

During this first year of activity of the Foundation significant financial help to purchase pharmaceuticals has been sent to the local Churches in America, Asia, Africa and Europe.

Concrete guidelines for action

I would like to offer certain suggestions at the level of guidelines for action to those who are involved at various levels in the fight against HIV/AIDS:

To Christian communities: that they may continue to promote the stability of the family and the education of children in a correct understanding of sexual activity as a gift of God for self-giving that is lovingly full and fertile.

To governments: that they may promote the overall health of their populations and foster care for AIDS patients, basing themselves on the principles of responsibility, solidarity, justice and fairness.

To the pharmaceutical industries: that they may facilitate economic access to anti-viral pharmaceuticals for the treatment of HIV/AIDS and those pharmaceuticals that are needed to treat opportunistic infections.

To scientists and health-care workers: that they may renew their solidarity and do everything they can to advance biomedical research into HIV/AIDS in order to find new and effective pharmaceuticals that are able to stem the phenomenon.

To the mass media: that they may provide transparent, correct and truthful information to populations on this phenomenon and on methods for its prevention, without forms of exploitation.

I would like to conclude with the words which Pope Benedict XVI addressed to the Bishops of South Africa during their ad limina visit on 10 June 2005: "Brother Bishops, I share your deep concern over the devastation caused by AIDS and related diseases. I especially pray for the widows, the orphans, the young mothers and those whose lives have been shattered by this cruel epidemic.

"I urge you to continue your efforts to fight this virus, which not only kills but seriously threatens the economic and social stability of the Continent".