

AIDS ministry workers must have hope, strong spirit

South Bend, Ind. (CNS) — One of the haunting concerns about ministry to people with AIDS is that "we are going to get too tired to minister," Archbishop John R. Roach of St. Paul-Minneapolis told participants at the National Catholic HIV/AIDS Ministry Conference July 17.

"Here it seems to me, is where we as a church have to make our mark," Archbishop Roach said. "We cannot be a people of despair and be true to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We must be a people of hope."

Archbishop Roach told the 160 participants gathered at the University of Notre Dame that working in ministry to those with AIDS, acquired immune deficiency syndrome, or with HIV, the human immunodeficiency virus that causes AIDS,

must be seen as a way to both serve others and grow individually.

"The very enormity of the problem demands not our discouragement, but rather new efforts on our part," Archbishop Roach said.

A second speaker at the conference, Father Richard P. McBrien, theology department chairman at the University of Notre Dame, emphasized the church's sacrament of the anointing of the sick and its place in healing the community.

"A church which is not interested in healing and in the total health of the human person and of the human community at large is not the church of Christ," Father McBrien said. "A church which abandons those who — by certain of the world's standards — are no longer of practical use

is not the church of Christ."

In considering the needs of people with AIDS and their families, the church, "which embodies the presence of the healing and compassionate Christ, cannot turn its face or its hands or its resources away," he continued.

Father McBrien also touched on the importance of avoiding standing in judgment against others. "Self-righteousness and hypocrisy are the ever present temptations of the religious personality. No subject sets these negative forces in motion so quickly as human sexuality and sexual behavior," he said.

"Prejudice and discrimination, especially those in greatest need, are utterly antithetical to the Gospel and to the mission of the church," Father McBrien said.

Acknowledging that he is something of an outsider to AIDS ministry, Father McBrien told participants their specific work is connected to other ministries of the church.

"All of us, whoever we are and wherever we work, are called to the service of our neighbor and of our larger communities, to be ministers, nurturers, of justice and healing," he said.

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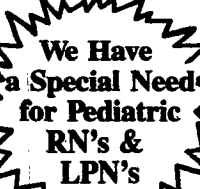
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