

Mother Teresa's health improves as world prays

CALCUTTA, India (CNS) — Doctors treating Mother Teresa said Aug. 27 they were increasingly confident she would recover from heart problems, a lung infection and malaria.

"In comparison to the suffering she had, we can certainly say that she is significantly better," said Dr. Sudipta Sen, one of the doctors treating the Nobel laureate at Woodlands Nursing Home.

"We cannot say she is totally out of danger, but we are feeling much more optimistic," he added.

Mother Teresa spoke Aug. 27 for the first time since her hospitalization, and Dr. Dinamani Banerjee said she expressed concern about who would pay her hospital bills.

Banerjee also said doctors would monitor her condition through the night before moving her out of intensive care.

Doctors took Mother Teresa off a respirator for six hours Aug. 26. Sen said Aug. 27 that the oxygen tube in her throat would be removed within 24 hours if there were no complications.

Missionary of Charity Sister Andrea said Mother Teresa was pestering doctors to be allowed to leave the hospital.

"It's almost like a resurrection," she said.

Mother Teresa, who founded the Missionaries of Charity, celebrated her 86th birthday in the hospital Aug. 27.

Mother Teresa was admitted to the hospital Aug. 20 with a fever. Doctors discovered she had malaria, and at one point her heartbeat was irregular "only for a few seconds" before doctors corrected it, Sen said.

She also received antibiotics for a lung infection.

With the help of nurses, Mother Teresa sat up in bed Aug. 26 for a short period. Because of the tube in her throat, she could not speak, but wrote short notes.

"I want to see sisters," she wrote. When she was visited



Mother Teresa

James Baca/CNS

by six of her Missionaries of Charity she scribbled another note that said, "Sisters, God bless you."

Indian Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda and Archbishop Henry D'Souza of Calcutta joined the country's parliament and several socio-political leaders in wishing Mother Teresa a speedy recovery.

Get-well wishes from world leaders flooded the moth-

erhouse of the Missionaries of Charity, the congregation that Mother Teresa started to help the poor and needy.

Pope John Paul II sent Mother Teresa get-well wishes that were conveyed on his behalf by telephone to the papal nuncio in India, who passed on the pope's wishes to the order. The pope thanked God for Mother Teresa's "service to the poorest of the poor."

Cardinal James A. Hickey of Washington issued a statement calling for prayers for Mother Teresa.

"Just as Mother Teresa has opened her heart to the sick and the dying, so now we open our hearts to her in prayer," the statement said.

A priest at an Aug. 26 gathering at Missionaries of Charity headquarters in Calcutta said that the previous day, for the first time since she was hospitalized, Mother Teresa requested Communion.

People of various religions prayed in the Missionaries of Charity house and other places of worship in Calcutta and elsewhere, a Missionaries of Charity spokeswoman said.

One Muslim went to the house, put down his prayer mat at the foot of the crucifix in the chapel corridor, knelt down facing Mecca and prayed fervently for Mother Teresa, the spokeswoman said.

Day and night prayer vigils were held in all Missionaries of Charity houses, said the spokeswoman, adding, "We are confident that our prayers for her recovery will be heard; it has happened before."

Mother Teresa, who won the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize, has been widely acclaimed as a living saint.

In April, she was hospitalized after she fell and fractured her collarbone.

In 1989, Mother Teresa received a pacemaker, and in late December 1991 she underwent angioplasty. In 1993, she was hospitalized for several days after a fall in which she broke three ribs.

Diocesan, church officials respond to welfare reform

By Nancy Hartnagel
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — President Clinton signed into law Aug. 22 a welfare reform package that the U.S. Catholic bishops, Catholic Charities USA and other advocates for the poor and immigrants have called meanspirited.

The signing has also spurred the Diocese of Rochester to launch "Operation Alert," a diocesan-wide project to track the impact of the package on local individuals.

"We hope to utilize our past and present experience of substantial service to the poor as a basis for an open, intelligent and respectful dialogue concerning problems or risks arising as a result of the reform process," explained Jack Balinsky, director of diocesan Catholic Charities. "But before we begin to talk about it, we must make sure that women, children, the elderly and the sick who may suffer as a result of welfare reform are cared for."

At the White House signing ceremony for the legislation, President Clinton declared, "We're going to take this historic

chance to try to re-create the nation's social bargain with the poor."

But Jesuit Father Fred Kammer, president of Catholic Charities USA, said in an Aug. 21 fax to members that "the forces of meanspiritedness won the day" in the welfare battle.

"The responsibility and blame for the damage to America's immigrant, hungry, disabled and poor children and families lays squarely in the halls of Congress, at the White House, and in certain religious and political lobbies who have been in the forefront of this deplorable national disgrace," he wrote Catholic Charities members.

Earlier this summer, the bishops sent letters to representatives, senators and the White House urging major changes in the "deeply flawed" bill. After Congress passed it, the bishops urged a presidential veto in a letter hand-delivered to the White House July 26.

In an August document, the U.S. Catholic Conference Department of Social Development and World Peace said that, despite some improvements, "in many ways the legislation remains incon-

sistent with the principles outlined by the (bishops') Administrative Board in March 1995."

The document said the bill's bad features include:

- An end to the federal guarantee of cash assistance to the poor, now replaced by block grants to states.
- An end to most assistance, including Medicaid health coverage, for future legal immigrants.
- Food stamp cuts of more than \$27 billion over six years.
- Insufficient funding to achieve the requirement to work after two years of benefits.
- A provision that allows states to withdraw a portion of their contributions to cash assistance.

USCC staff members were among an estimated 300 people joining in a demonstration across from the White House during the signing.

As part of diocesan response to the new legislation, Balinsky unveiled "Operation Alert" Aug. 23.

The effort will involve 13 parishes throughout the 12-county diocese. They

will chart increased needs individuals may have as a result of welfare reform.

"Our primary concern has always been and will continue to be the well-being and dignity of the human person," Balinsky said. "Beyond the policy debate, we must be equipped as a matter of first priority to alleviate the human suffering that may occur in cases where benefits have been curtailed."

Balinsky said Catholic Charities will work with community groups to mitigate any negative impacts of welfare reform.

Meanwhile, in a statement issued Aug. 8 from its Washington office, the Catholic Health Association said it is committed to addressing "a major flaw" in the bill that restricts Medicaid coverage for legal immigrants.

Father Kammer told Catholic Charities members they "should take comfort that your advocacy removed the most ill-conceived and vindictive components of this legislation: the food stamp block grant; the mandatory family cap; the exclusion of children of teen mothers; the child nutrition block grant; and cuts in the Earned Income Tax Credit."

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