

WORLD & NATION

Diana's mourners include Mother Teresa, pope

CALCUTTA, India (CNS) — Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity offered their condolences over the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, remembering Diana's and the nuns' mutual concern for the poor.

"I am very sorry. All the sisters and I are praying for her and her family to know God's peace and comfort in this moment," Mother Teresa said during an impromptu press conference Aug. 31.

"She had come to my house, and I had been to hers (Kensington Palace in 1996)," said a sad-looking Mother Teresa at the motherhouse in Calcutta.

The nobel laureate nun spoke of the 36-year-old princess having great love for the poor and wanting to know more about the poor and handicapped, reported UCA News, an Asian church news agency based in Thailand.

"I remember her as full of compassion for the poor and disabled," she said.

Mother Teresa's close associate, Sunita Kumar, who spoke for the order, told UCA News that the 87-year-old nun was "shocked to know that the princess died after a tragic car accident" in Paris Aug. 31.

The nuns immediately went into the chapel to pray. They prayed in turns all day long, and Mother Teresa was overheard saying "ways of God" intermittently in her prayers, Kumar told UCA News.

The blackboard before the Missionaries of Charity motherhouse chapel in Calcutta carried a note: "Please pray for the repose of the soul of Princess Diana," and the nuns inside kept a prayerful silence.

Kumar said Mother Teresa had corresponded with the late princess, and a Missionaries of Charity nun-nurse who accompanies Mother Teresa in her travels said that "meeting Diana was one of the



CNS photo/Mike Segar
Princess Diana bows to Mother Teresa at the Missionaries of Charity house in the Bronx, N.Y., June 18. Mother Teresa remembered Diana as a friend who had compassion for the poor.

highlights of the trips" for the Missionaries of Charity founder. According to Kumar, the princess became "very fond" of Mother Teresa's work after she first came to Calcutta in 1992, although she was disappointed that Mother Teresa was in a Rome hospital. They met later in Rome.

During Diana's visit to the motherhouse, "she openly cried twice," Kumar said. The first was when she was handed Mother Teresa's personal message to her: "Be one heart full of love in the heart of Jesus and Mary. God bless you."

The second time was inside the chapel, when nuns sang the hymn "Make your life something beautiful for God," which Mother Teresa wrote, she said.

During the 1992 visit, Diana also went to Shishu Bhavan, a Missionaries of Charity home for abandoned children, where she sat on a wooden bench with some of the children, who felt very close to her, Kumar said.

The princess appreciated the "normality and simplicity around her visit and was touched by the lack of fuss and absence of extras," Kumar said. Diana went on to visit Missionaries of Charity homes for the dying and for people with leprosy.

Kumar said that last year when Mother Teresa was in London, to spare Diana an ordeal with the press, she visited the princess at her home in Kensington.

French police were investigating the role of photographers whose pursuit of the late princess might have been a factor in the Aug. 30 tunnel crash, in which the driver and the princess' companion, Dodi al Fayed, were also killed. Police also reported that the car's driver had a blood alcohol level three times the legal French limit.

Following the crash, Pope John Paul II sent a message of sympathy to Britain's Royal Family.

In a Sept. 1 telegram, the Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, said Pope John Paul was "deeply saddened" at the news of Diana's death the previous day, and "has offered prayers commending her to our Heavenly Father's eternal love."

Cardinal Sodano asked Cardinal George Basil Hume of Westminster to convey the pope's "heartfelt condolences to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, assuring her that he shares the sorrow of the British people."

"Once the shock is absorbed, then you begin to feel sad that somebody young and somebody who had such a place in the life of the nation should be taken from us in this way," Cardinal Hume said. "This is one of the great tragedies of our present day."

People in Britain and around the world were mourning the sudden death of the princess, who had divorced Prince Charles, heir to the British throne, a year before.

Her private struggles became public obsessions, and she shared her troubles in television and newspaper interviews before and during the divorce proceedings.

She was active in humanitarian causes such as caring for AIDS patients and elimination of anti-personnel land mines.

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