



A lifeguard leaves a sign on Maushop Beach near Gay Head on Martha's Vineyard, Mass., with a prayer for John F. Kennedy Jr., his wife, Carolyn Bessette, and her sister, Lauren July 16.

Kennedys lost at sea

By Nancy Hartnagel
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Sadly, Catholics across the nation once again were praying for the Kennedy family in the aftermath of tragedy.

From U.S. cardinals and bishops to parishioners attending Sunday Mass, Catholics offered prayers for John F. Kennedy Jr. — son of the only Catholic president of the United States — his wife, Carolyn Bessette Kennedy, and her sister, Lauren Bessette.

All three were presumed dead following the disappearance and apparent crash of their plane late July 16 off the coast of Martha's Vineyard, Mass.

Bishop Joseph A. Fiorenza of Galveston-Houston, Texas, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, said the bishops joined in mourning the loss.

"The pain surrounding this tragedy is shared by many in this nation and especially by their fellow Catholics who join them in prayer and ask God's comfort for the families," he said in a statement released July 19 in Washington.

He expressed the hope that the families "will find strength in their union with God, feel solace in the realization that life is not ended but changed, and fondly recall that God graced them, even for too short a time, with the lives" of the young people lost at sea.

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Calls grow for debt relief

Imagine being saddled with debt so large that payments consume as much as half of your income.

Imagine that in order to make those payments, you had to deprive your family of adequate food, shelter, education and health care — leading to stunted lives and early deaths.

Imagine further that despite austerity measures and great suffering, the debts would be passed on to future generations, crushing your children and your children's children under their weight.

Finally, imagine that you weren't even responsible for accumulating the debts in the first place.

According to a growing chorus of voices, that is precisely the situation that a number of Third World nations face.

And from the Vatican to relief agencies to Congress, that chorus is calling for a reduction — or elimination — of the debt burden on the world's poorest nations.

Pope John Paul II, in particular, has been outspoken on the need to forgive or reduce debt, linking it to the Great Jubilee 2000.

In his 1994 apostolic letter "As the Third Millennium Draws Near," he wrote:

"Thus, in the spirit of the Book of Leviticus (25:8-12),

Christians will have to raise their voice on behalf of all the poor of the world, proposing the jubilee as an appropriate time to give thought, among other things, to reducing substantially, if not cancelling outright, the international debt which seriously threatens the future of many nations."

According to Jubilee 2000/USA — a coalition of such church and relief agencies as Maryknoll, Catholic Relief Services, the U.S. Catholic Mission Association, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and Bread for the World — debt is quite literally threatening the future of people in a number of nations.

The coalition estimates that 41 of the most-indebted low-income nations currently owe \$213 billion dollars. That sum is owed primarily to foreign governments — especially to the United States — and to such agencies as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

As a result of that indebtedness, Jubilee 2000 reports:

• In Uganda in 1996, the government spent \$17 per person on debt repayment, and only \$3 on health care, while one of every five Ugandan children died from preventable diseases before age 5.

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