

WORLD & NATION

Pope shares health views

By Lynne Weil
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Health is more than biological perfection and banishment of pain, Pope John Paul II said in a message to mark the annual church commemoration of the ill next year.

"Our society risks making of health an idol to which every other value becomes secondary," said the pope's seven-page message for the World Day of the Sick, observed annually Feb. 11, the feast Our Lady of Lourdes.

Next year's event is to coincide with a special celebration called Jubilee for the Sick and for Health Care Workers. Pope John Paul's message was published at the Vatican Aug. 6.

"The Christian vision of man contrasts with a notion of health reduced purely to exuberant vitality, satisfied with its own physical efficiency and ruling out any positive consideration of suffering," the pontiff said.

"Because health is not limited to biological perfection, a life lived in suffering offers room for growth and self-realization and opens the path toward the discovery of new values," he added.

An image of health founded in respect for the human person, Pope John Paul said, is not identified solely "with the absence of illness," and it can lead "to more complete harmony and a healthy equilibrium on a physical level."

He added that not everyone in the world has adequate care to ensure good health.

"I am thinking, in particular, of the great social imbalances in access to health care resources," he said, adding that this problem was particularly acute in developing countries.

"This unjust inequality collides, in an in-

creasingly dramatic way, with the fundamental rights of the person," Pope John Paul said. "Whole populations do not have the possibility to use even the most urgently needed medicines, while other places abandon themselves to the abuse and waste of costly pharmaceuticals."

The pope applauded efforts worldwide in industrialized countries to empower sick people, among them proposed legal programs to enforce patients' rights.

He also noted that recent years had brought progress in medical treatment, while the volunteer health care force continued to grow worldwide.

However, Pope John Paul added that "at the close of the second millennium it cannot be said that humanity has done all that is necessary to alleviate the immense weight of suffering that imposes itself on individuals, families and whole societies."

Individual and societal choices worsened suffering in some ways, the pope said, noting that this century especially had been marked by wars, drug addiction and AIDS, as well as illnesses associated with environmental decay.

Healthy people require healthy natural surroundings, he said, calling the environment "the house" of human beings and the sum total of the resources entrusted to their custody and management.

The pope said church and society must create "an ecology worthy of man."

The pope noted that "innumerable people, in silence and humility, (had) given their own lives for their ill neighbors" while serving as health care workers in church-run facilities.

He advocated a continued church presence in the medical field to help ensure "the precious good of human health and ... an attentive watch for all the inequalities and contradictions which pervade the world of health."

Cardinal O'Connor returns to pulpit after surgery

NEW YORK (CNS) — Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York, recuperating from removal of a brain tumor, resumed public activities at the annual Labor Day Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral Sept. 12, eight days after his release from Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center.

Auxiliary Bishop Patrick J. Sheridan of New York presided at the Mass. But Cardinal O'Connor delivered the homily and appeared to have regained much of his normal strength.

He was able to stand for a homily of the usual length, and knelt at a prie-dieu for extended periods during the eu-

charistic prayers and during distribution of Communion.

The archdiocese did not disclose which day the surgery was performed. The cardinal entered Sloan-Kettering for tests Aug. 25, and was released Sept. 4.

Cardinal O'Connor, 79, joked in characteristic fashion about his medical condition. After being welcomed with enthusiastic applause at the beginning of the Mass and again when he climbed into the pulpit, he remarked, "This has been a truly marvelous funeral, and I have enjoyed every bit of it."



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