



CNS/Declan Walsh

Elizabeth Simango, 25, with her son at a Porta Farm squatters camp near Harare, Zimbabwe, has seen six siblings die as a result of AIDS.

HIV-infected should be welcomed

DURBAN, South Africa (CNS) — Church leaders in Kwazulu-Natal province urged churches to become a "welcoming home" for people infected with HIV/AIDS.

The statement on the role churches should be playing in response to the pandemic was issued to coincide with the international AIDS conference in Durban July 9-14. The Kwazulu-Natal province is the South African province with the highest rate of HIV/AIDS.

Paddy Kearney, who heads the ecumenical organization Diakonia in Durban, said the statement was drawn up partly in response to the problem that many people infected with HIV/AIDS experience churches as hostile.

"Judgmental sermons are common, and people with HIV/AIDS are often blamed for their condition by other members of congregations," Kearney said.

"This is little different from the broader community, where several people who disclosed their status were deliberately killed," he said.

The church leaders said that, along with a healthy diet and exercise, faith in God and peace of mind would help people with the HIV virus live longer. But peace of mind was hard to achieve in communities "where fear forces people to conceal their illness," they said.

Churches should teach their congregations to accept and support people with HIV/AIDS and should encourage em-

ployers to keep them employed as long as possible, said the letter, signed by Archbishop Wilfrid Napier of Durban, president of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, retired Archbishop Denis Hurley of Durban, and four other bishops of dioceses in the province.

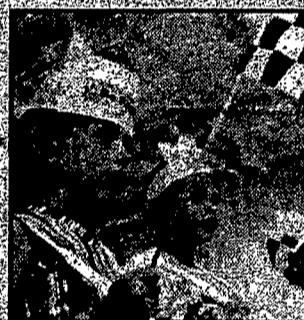
The church leaders said they believed lifestyles and behaviors can change and that the church should provide open, honest and challenging education about sex and relationships. Adult church members should provide living examples of faithful lives to the youth, they said.

They added that the church can play a "crucial role in changing society to stop the economic and sexual exploitation of women by men."

Catholic Courier

DIocese OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK ■ VOL. 111 NO. 41 ■ THURSDAY, JULY 20, 2000 ■ 75¢ ■ 12 PAGES

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Global priest presence on the rise in diocese

Story by Mike Latona



Photo by Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Father Ernest P. Udoh, left, of Rochester's Church of the Annunciation, and Father Peter Enyan-Boadu, of Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Brockport, greet another priest at a picnic at St. Jerome's Church in East Rochester on July 11.

Father George Okoth cheerfully acknowledged that his presence in western Livingston County may raise a few eyebrows.

On July 1, Father Okoth became the first African priest to be assigned to St. Thomas Aquinas/St. Lucy parishes in Leicester and Retsof, two predominantly white communities.

"I'm thrilled about it! I'm going to give them the rainbow color," laughed the Kenyan priest, who is also serving as sacramental minister at SUNY College at Geneseo.

The rainbow is getting more and more colorful in the Rochester Diocese. Seventeen foreign priests are serving in part- and full-time capacities, with three more due to arrive by Sept. 1.

Whereas the number of active diocesan priests has steadily decreased over the past several years, there is a growing influx of international clergy. According to the diocesan Office of Priest Personnel, the number of foreign priests has nearly doubled in just a year. Most of them hail from African countries, as

well as Poland, Sri Lanka in south Asia, Mexico and Vietnam.

Foreign priests have traditionally come to the Rochester Diocese for college study or sabbaticals, with the intent to return to their home dioceses after a limited time — two years or less. But longer-term commitments are taking place as the priests are staying on to fill sacramental needs around the diocese.

"Now they're coming not for purely education purposes, but for assignments," said Sandy Grocki, diocesan coordinator of clergy services. "I do know this — after they finish school, more of them are staying. I don't think a lot of people (in the diocese) realize there are this many foreign priests here now."

Even more may be on the way. Bill Olsen, diocesan director of human resources, observed that some foreign priests already in this diocese are serving as pipelines for priests from their homelands.

"It's a new phenomenon for us," Olsen said.

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fifth in an occasional series

This is the fifth installment in an occasional series on the effects of a declining number of priests and related vocations issues.