

African continent in crisis

Africa is in crisis! All the pope's ambassadors to nations in Africa recently were summoned to the Vatican to consider how best to respond to his concern that this continent not be abandoned again.

For four centuries Africa was abandoned and raped by European powers. Beginning with colonial era slavery and continuing to the present unfair trade policies and general apathy, the United States has participated.

Africa's people, land, resources and dignity were stolen. In the middle of the last century, however, African nations began to acquire independence. But largely due to these past abuses, they started out with many educational, political and economic disadvantages.

Africa never has received the attention and assistance it justly deserves. Usually it takes a catastrophe to get American and European attention. And even then it is often too little too late.

Sudan is a classic example. The desperately poor, war-ravaged people of the Darfur region are finally on the developed world's radar screen but are not out of the woods. A civil war between Darfur rebels and the government in Khartoum has been devastating to civilians. Government-backed Arab militias have been killing, raping and enslaving many of the region's non-Arab black Africans.

These attacks, and starva-



Tony Magliano

Making a Difference

tion, have cost the lives of more than 35,000 people. Another 1.2 million are displaced within Sudan. And approximately 200,000 have fled into neighboring Chad. Before year's end the United Nations expects an additional 100,000 Sudanese to pour into this welcoming, but very poor nation.

Sudan and Chad are not alone. There are serious problems facing many African nations.

In Uganda, an 18-year civil conflict between government forces and a cult-like rebel group called the Lord's Resistance Army has caused the deaths of more than 100,000. The LRA has abducted 20,000 children to serve as soldiers and sexual slaves. The government has herded 1.8 million people into camps lacking food and water. And the Sudanese government has been supplying the LRA with weapons, training and campsites on its side of the border.

Severe drought in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Kenya is causing food depletion,

threatening the lives of countless people.

If all this isn't bad enough, West Africa is experiencing a plague of biblical proportions. "The sky was dark of locusts and the swarm was everywhere! Children were burning abandoned tires and dry woods to keep away the locusts," said Massamba Gningue of Catholic Relief Services in Senegal.

When the locusts finally depart, all crops, grasses and leaves are gone. Locusts have devastated at least 28 West African countries. If not addressed, scarce seeds during the next planting season will extend food shortages for years to come.

Christ is calling us to help our African brothers and sisters! Here's what you can do:

First, contact the White House comment line (202-456-1111) and your two U.S. senators and congressperson (202-224-3121). Request that a new high-level U.S. peace envoy be appointed to Sudan as soon as possible. And ask for large increases in overall funding in the fight against African poverty and HIV/AIDS, as urged by the U.S. bishops.

Second, assist the life-saving work of CRS in Africa by sending a donation to Catholic Relief Services, Box 17090, Baltimore, MD 21203-7090. Kindly earmark your check "Africa in Crisis."

Tony Magliano is a columnist for Catholic News Service.

Weigh effect on intolerant

To the editor:

I was pleased to see the article of September 4/5 about celiac disease issues, referring to the mother who has appealed to the Vatican to let her daughter receive a rice wafer in place of a wheat host for her first Communion, because she has gluten intolerance.

There are many thousands of persons affected by this condition which can bring on severe reactions to even the tiniest crumbs of any gluten product. I am acquainted with a woman with celiac disease; she happens also to be a recovering alcoholic, sober for years, and the consequence is that she cannot receive the Eucharist under either form. She is a faith-filled, dedicated person whose main goal is to help others. It is painful for her and so many others to be deprived of the nourishment that is so central to our Christian life.

Of course Jesus left us the Eucharist under the form of wheaten bread and grape wine. That was and still is the common food of the people in that part of the world. Perhaps it is useless to speculate what might have been the tradition if he had taken on our humanity in a rice-based culture, but it is far from useless to raise the pastoral implications of having to deny Communion to

so many people who are struggling to be faithful disciples of Jesus, and who carry a very heavy cross on their way.

Gratia L'Esperance, RSM
Sisters of Mercy
Parsells Avenue
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Praises home for the dying

To the editor:

I would like to congratulate Mt. Carmel House on their recent 20th anniversary. I have recently had the opportunity to become a volunteer there. I cannot express what a wonderful experience it has been for me. I have never felt Christ so present to me as I have while working there. Not only are the residents wonderful people, the staff and volunteers seems to be filled with people who are truly dedicated to cherishing human life.

I thank them for their ministry and for opening their hearts and their doors to those who are in great need of love and support as their earthly life comes to an end. I also thank them for opening their door to me and giving me such a great opportunity to be with those near the end of life. This is a great grace for me.

Joanne Brown
Wyndale Road
Rochester

Rethink view of recent ad

To the editor:

In the August 21 classified section of our local paper was an unsigned — that's cowardly — ad:

"WE ARE NOT GOING BACK TO SACRED HEART CATHEDRAL. The church is stripped out and violence is taking over the neighborhood."

Hopefully that person or persons has kept all of the literature and previous issues of the *Catholic Courier* that describe the changes and the reasons for them. Think and pray about it.

Yes, there is some vio-

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