

Jan.-Feb. 2007

## Angelo D'Agostino, S.J.: Father, Doctor, Pastor, Benefactor

By Michael Czerny, SJ

"There is such great joy in seeing suffering people relieved." This is what Fr Angelo D'Agostino SJ said when he celebrated fifty years as a Jesuit in 2005. Surely he died a happy man.

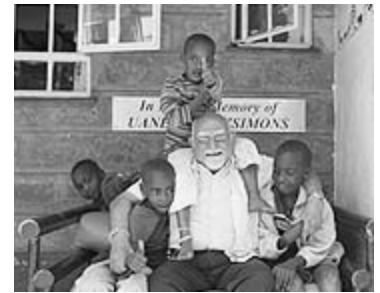
A missionary in Kenya for many years, the 80-year-old American priest and surgeon was wholly dedicated to serving others until his death in Nairobi on November 20, 2006. For the last fourteen years, Fr. D'Agostino, "D'Ag" to his friends, championed the cause of AIDS orphans and set up pioneer projects to meet their needs. He would say this was the happiest, most productive time of his life.

Fr. D'Agostino is best known for setting up Nyumbani Children's Home in 1991, Kenya's first hospice for abandoned HIV+ orphans. "He was on the board of an orphanage in Nairobi, and there was a question about admitting HIV+ children. The directors felt that they couldn't provide the medical infrastructure. So he left and said he would do it," recalls Sr. Mary Owen, IBVM, executive director of Nyumbani. "Fr. D'Agostino's vision to reach out to these children was born of the fact that they were considered of no significance."

"For him every child was a gift of God and a child of God. He wanted to give a home and a family to each," said Fr. Francis Rodrigues, SJ, assistant director of Nyumbani. "HIV sufferers were his special target of affection and attention. To them he was father, doctor, pastor and benefactor."

Today, ninety orphans live in Nyumbani Home, benefiting from state-of-the-art medical treatment and holistic care in a family environment. Over the years, the project has ex-

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Fr. D'Agostino surrounded by some of those he served so well in Kenya.

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**AFJN Annual Conference:** It's time to register for our conference, "...and How are the Children?" to be held in Washington from March 9-12. Come and let the new Congress know about your concerns for Africa's children. Register at [www.advocacydays.com](http://www.advocacydays.com) or call the AFJN office, 202-884-9780. Early registration ends February 1.

## Thanks and Best Wishes to Michael Poffenberger

By Rocco Puopolo

For the past year and a half, AFJN has been injected with a whirl of energy and passion for Africa in the person of Michael Poffenberger. Michael graduated from Notre Dame University in 2005 where he was the leader of that college's chapter of AFJN, the first in the country, and one of the founders of the Uganda Conflict Action Network.

Michael came to AFJN in the summer of 2005 to join Fr. Bill Dyer in Washington as they picked up the reins and jump-started AFJN into the present. Michael was readily able to serve the membership in many capacities. He was instrumental in developing our website, improved AFJN's outreach to new members, especially young people, and managed many administrative tasks in the office. During his time at AFJN, Michael liaised with congressional members and State department officials and their staffers in advocacy. He also worked with members of other similar advocacy agencies throughout Washington to bring AFJN's voice to shared



Michael makes a point during the recent Northern Uganda Lobby Day.

concerns. Michael brought thoughtful and focused analysis to issues with which AFJN concerns itself.

Michael was and is grounded in the Uganda experience that he knows from his time there, from the people he works with on this issue here as well as in Uganda and also from his study and analysis that provided us with very concise and valued tools for advocacy and education. Uganda is where his true passion rests, and so Michael is moving on in mid-January to be part of a more formal coalition for Uganda that will gather the many actors who hope to bring critical mass and attention to guaranteeing peace in Northern Uganda and the surrounding region.

On behalf of all the members of AFJN, I offer Michael our sincere thanks and best wishes in his new ventures. His contribution to the continued service of AFJN as well as to the advocacy and education communities has been very much appreciated and will be missed. Michael, God speed.

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panded to include Lea Toto, a community care program that assists around 2,000 HIV+ orphans, and Nyumbani Village in eastern Kenya, which will foster self-sufficiency among orphans and elderly people.

The renown and support enjoyed by Nyumbani in Kenya and beyond is a mark of respect for its founder's vision, rooted in intense compassion and a professional approach. "D'Ag" moved ahead with clarity of vision, an inner vision led by the Spirit. He talked about it, pondered it, and prayed over it," said Fr. Rodrigues. And he had the gift of enthusing others to subscribe to his mission. "He called us beyond where we would go and invoked our generosity," said Sr. Owens. "The needs of the children were his focus."

Fr. D'Agostino was capable of fierce righteous anger, directed at those who threatened the rights of his beloved children and others oppressed by the disease. He denounced the lack of availability of antiretroviral (ARV) drugs in Africa, a campaign affectionately remembered by Fr. Rodrigues. "D'Ag" had winning ways of saying things that helped him make friends and influence people. He also had annoying ways of saying things that made him

lose friends, especially when he attacked multinational drug companies that were making exorbitant profits on life-saving drugs used by HIV/AIDS patients."

Larger than life, Fr. D'Agostino has left behind a precious legacy that Nyumbani will surely preserve. But not only that: his example is an open invitation to the Church to reach out to Africa's ten million AIDS orphans.

Please visit [www.nyumbani.org](http://www.nyumbani.org) and [www.nyumbanivillage.org](http://www.nyumbanivillage.org), or contact the African Jesuit AIDS Network (AJAN) at [ajanews@jesuits.ca](mailto:ajanews@jesuits.ca) and [www.jesuitaids.net](http://www.jesuitaids.net).

*Michael Czerny, a Canadian Jesuit, is presently the coordinator of the African Jesuit AIDS Network in Nairobi, Kenya.*

### Congo Bill Passes Congress!

In the final hours of the 109th Congress, members responded to a deluge of communication from constituents and passed the Democratic Republic of the Congo Relief, Security and Democracy Promotion Act. Thanks to all those who called and wrote!

## AIDS Prevention When Meds are Scarce: One Local Effort

By Jacques Bahati

Since the onset of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, I wondered if the message of HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention had been heard by all. It is not that I am interested in the history of HIV/AIDS as a disease, but that I am more interested in what is happening to the people on the local level. In the village of Biruma in North-Kivu, a province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), an HIV/AIDS awareness team passed through around 1999 and explained how this pandemic is a threat to all worldwide. Since then, no one has come back to follow up with more information or to remind the people that the danger has not vanished. Their only reminder was the frequent deaths of HIV/AIDS victims in their community. But they rarely knew that the deaths were a result of AIDS.

Believing that educating people is the only effective and affordable medicine available, my father and I have been trying to bring awareness of the HIV/AIDS threat to Nkokwe, an area located in the eastern province of North Kivu in the DRC. To inaugurate this program, my sister-in-law, Yvonne Majori, who is a nurse, trained three other women and spent a week in Nkokwe teaching the basics of HIV/AIDS prevention. The teaching team made it clear to the people that HIV/AIDS is a threat to individuals and to the community.

My father, Maheshe Edouard, the principal of the Nkove Catholic Primary School and the outstation at Kanyabusoro, organized the people. By virtue of his role as principal, he is automatically considered among the leaders of the Catholic Communities of the area. This made it easy for him to organize the event in the small base communities and in his school. He also obtained the interest of the military personnel that were stationed in the area.

The closing of the program was held during the Sunday worship service that my father presided over. In his sermon, he reminded people that HIV/AIDS is ready to wipe away villages if nothing is done. For the first time, the people realized how real, dangerous and particularly life threatening the HIV/AIDS pandemic is. They know that

there have been people who died after being so sick, but they do not know for sure whether or not they died from HIV/AIDS. We also know that during the war in the Congo (beginning in 1997), and because of the current presence of rebel groups in different regions of the Congo, HIV/AIDS spreads by rape and prostitution. People in these communities understand now that HIV/AIDS is in their midst. What to do is the question to be answered.

Fear of rejection and isolation from their community and family keeps HIV/AIDS victims (whether of rape, shared needles, infected spouse, etc.) from coming out and telling their stories.

Throughout my studies of theology and ethics, I believed that getting involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS was one of the ways I could embody the theology I studied and put a face to the cries of the victims of HIV/AIDS. As a result, I continue working for HIV/AIDS awareness. I have been

networking with St. Anne Catholic parish in Barrington, Illinois to find ways they can help the effort to extend the awareness that has begun in this small corner of the Congo. This program is progressing positively.

At least three times a year, the team will go back to the same villages and tell the same story to support and celebrate the people's willingness and commitment to not forget what HIV/AIDS is about and what we need to do about it. The message we bring to the people is the following: "If we cannot afford medicine for malaria, we cannot afford HIV/AIDS medicine. Even for those who afford the malaria medicine, there is no guarantee that they will be able to afford both the malaria and HIV/AIDS medicine if ever the latter will be available. The only alternative is prevention." Finally, we are not concerned about how to get the people together to talk about the HIV/AIDS issue. The structures are already in place for the work to be done. Church communities and schools are places in which to get the word to people. The village civil authorities are a wonderful resource for such important issues. We only need to get involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

*Jacques Bahati is a graduate of Catholic Theological Union with an MA in ethics. He is an intern at AFJN.*



One local community at Nkokwe at the end of an HIV/AIDS awareness workshop

## Zambian Communities Identify Factors in AIDS Pandemic

By Brother Pius Chibwe Musilizo, OMI

There is no doubt that AIDS remains one of the biggest challenges facing emerging democracies in Africa today. Lukulu, located in the Western part of Zambia, is no exception. The population in this area is growing fast and so is the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Regardless of whether or not one is infected, all are affected. Several factors have contributed to the increase of this epidemic:

*Recreation Deprivation:* Lukulu is one of the largest districts in Zambia, yet it is also one of the least developed in terms of recreation for children, youth and adults. The lack of proper recreation outlets means that many youth who spend only a few hours in class (or do not attend school at all) occupy themselves with illicit activities such as alcohol consumption and prostitution. These activities lead to unprotected sex, where many young people contract HIV/AIDS.

*Poor Family Structure:* Many families in Lukulu are dysfunctional. Lack of parent-child communication results in children who are ill prepared to live well in society: girls start relationships with older men (a.k.a. "Sugar Daddies") thinking they will find happiness with them, but end up living with physical and sexual abuse. Boys find refuge in alcohol and unprotected sex (which perpetuates the HIV/AIDS pandemic).

*Poverty:* Over 80% of people in Lukulu live on under \$1 per day. Living in poverty takes a toll on everyone, especially women caring for children and households. Women tend to have extramarital relationship with "rich" men as a means of providing for their families and themselves. Because of this, a number of women end up contracting HIV/AIDS, further compounding the problem.

These factors and other components have perpetuated the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Lukulu, Zambia. The Catholic Church in Lukulu and other organizations are doing their best to address these problems. A recent Home-based Care Meeting with the Indunas of Lukulu (representatives of the Litunga king of the Lozi people) proved to be a significant step toward this end. The main purpose of this meeting was to discuss matters pertaining to HIV/AIDS in Lukulu communities. The Indunas suggested a couple of factors contributing to the AIDS epidemic including a lack of commitment to work, alcohol abuse and irresponsible sexual behavior in and outside of marriage. During the course of the home-based care meeting, it was suggested that the Indunas meet and discuss these issues among themselves and within their communities.

In addition to Home-based Care Meetings, Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation is spreading the message, "HIV/AIDS is not a death sentence," to the nation just before the main news program. In reality, people living with HIV/AIDS still think it's a death sentence. The stigma that accompanies "coming out" (re: AIDS) is substantial. Because of this, many people wait until they are very sick to deal with the disease. This is unfortunate, because there are drugs available to curb the effects of living with AIDS.

Efforts to educate, alleviate and prevent AIDS-related issues are underway. This year's World AIDS Day theme is "Accountability." The slogan is "Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise"; a poignant reminder to stick to our word with HIV/AIDS related issues.

AFJN intern Jennifer Way contributed to the editing of this article.

### Witness

The cathedral steeple  
Towers above the small  
Scarred village

Majestic, graceful,  
Reflecting spirit,  
Courage of a people

Bearing wounds of war, bombs,  
death;

Holed roof, damaged walls,  
Ruins still falling

Witness to horrors  
Once were,  
Still are...

But standing tall,  
Embracing, lifting all in prayer  
Daring to hope.



This cathedral is at the center of a once lovely town of Manono, DRC. Although damaged by the war, the cathedral is used daily for Mass and morning prayers by the Catholic community. This reflection was written after Sr. Roxanne visited Manono.

Sr. Roxanne Schares, SSND is presently ministering with the Jesuit Refugee Service as Education Resource Person for Africa, based in Nairobi, Kenya.

## Congo Global Action: You Can Be a Part of It

By Rocco Puopolo

In late November, representatives of over 70 advocacy organizations gathered for a three-day weekend work session to think through a coalition that would help create more effective political will and action around the fragile situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Congo Global Action was born. It is an alliance of global humanitarian, human rights, and faith-based organizations, students, members of the Congolese Diaspora and other grassroots movements.

They came together to advocate with one voice for Congo and to urge increased local and international response to the situation of post-war and post-election DRC. Twenty-five of the 70 organizations have officially become members of this coalition. The AFJN Board, at its December

meeting, ratified our membership in this Coalition.

Congo Global Action brings together all these groups in order to engage people at the grassroots both in the Congo, as well as here in the US. We intend to develop activities that go beyond direct advocacy; from education nights to vigils to direct aid fundraisers.

There are three major conferences being planned that are intended to stir these grassroots entities. The first will be in Europe in the spring of 2007. The second will be in Africa during the summer of 2007 and the third will be in Washington, DC in the fall of 2007. If you wish to know more about this Congo Global Action Coalition or are interested in formally being part of it, contact Fr. Rocco (director@afjn.org). The coalition's Unity Statement follows.

### Congo Global Action Unity Statement

A historic opportunity is at hand for the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire).

The Congolese people have demonstrated their overwhelming commitment to the peaceful rebuilding of their country by participating in their first democratic election in more than 40 years.

Nonetheless, the DR Congo continues to suffer from what the United Nations calls "the world's deadliest emergency" and faces massive obstacles to its reconstruction:

More than 4 million Congolese have died since 1998 as a result of the war. Although "Africa's first World War" officially ended in 2003, more than 1,000 people continue to die each day; almost half of these are children under the age of five. Most of these deaths are due to disease and malnutrition and are easily preventable.

Rebel groups, militias, and oftentimes the underpaid and poorly-trained Congolese armed forces continue to kill, torture, rape, enslave, loot, and harass populations. Sexual violence in the DR Congo remains a daily threat for women and girls living in war-affected areas. Nationwide, the justice and security instruments remain largely dysfunctional and corrupt.

Vast quantities of mineral wealth are smuggled and exported from the DR Congo every year without benefit to the Congolese people. The UN has accused all nations involved in the conflict of using the war as a cover for this

looting. Networks of armed groups, elites, corporations, governments and Congolese civil and military officials control and pilfer diamonds, gold, cobalt, tin, copper and other natural resources. We benefit daily from the use of the DR Congo's looted riches such as *coltan*, a vital component of our computers, cell phones, and home gaming systems.

**The collective response to this crisis remains gravely insufficient.**

The DR Congo government must establish and maintain peace throughout all its provinces. It also must restore basic services, help millions of people return safely home and resume their livelihoods, set up efficient and trusted security and judiciary institutions, and organize economic usage of natural resources for the benefit of the Congolese. The people of the DR Congo must be empowered to hold their government accountable. The international community must provide adequate and sustained support for these efforts in order to save lives, keep people safe, and end economic exploitation.

As humanitarian, human rights, and faith-based organizations, students, Congolese, and grassroots movements, we come together to advocate for the DR Congo and urge increased local and international response, beginning with our own communities and institutions.

**JOIN US.**

## AFJN Announcements

### A New Synod of African Bishops Announced

Work has already begun on the upcoming Synod of African Bishops. This second special assembly for Africa was given the theme, "The Church in Africa in service to reconciliation, justice and peace." *"You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world"* (Mt 5: 13-14). Word has it, that the synod will be celebrated in 2009. The "lineamenta" was prepared in 2006 and can be accessed via the Vatican's website.

*Around Africa* welcomes discussion, comments, hopes, and suggestions from our readers for this synod. AFJN, together with the Catholic Task Force on Africa here in Washington, is working on ways that we in the US can prepare ourselves for this Ecclesial Event for Africa. It may be a very practical way to continue the attention for Africa that our US Bishops challenged us to have when they offered us the letter "A Call to Solidarity with Africa" in November of 2001. More information on these initiatives will follow in future issues of *Around Africa*.

### African Summit in Chicago a Success

For the fourth year, the Chicago Archdiocesan Office of Justice and Peace/CRS hosted an African Summit. St. Dorothy's Parish welcomed the more than 100 attendees. It featured Mr. Nick Clooney, a long time news reporter, an attentive student of world events, the father of George, the brother of Rosemary and a committed advocate for the poor. He spoke to the participants about the recent trip that he and George made to Darfur; why he went, what he saw, what he learned and what that experience had challenged him to do.

The summit also marked the beginning of the discernment dialogue to confirm the proposed twinning relationship between the Archdiocese of Chicago and the Diocese of Mongu, Zambia. As one participant said, "The archdiocese of Chicago, in establishing a relationship with a Zambian diocese, aims not to control, but to console and to support them. In the Zambian bishops' and lay ministers' social teaching document, "The Future is Ours," we learn much about their hopes and their challenges. Through the process of collaboration and relief services, we get to know what is going on and we advocate for possible durable solutions." Others recognized the gifts of faith and celebration that the diocese of Mongu teaches our US Churches, showing us the power of youthfulness in commitment and service.

Events such as this Africa Summit are one day gatherings of people concerned about Africa, whether they are from the continent and in Chicago as immigrants or students, missionaries who have served there, or simply persons who are interested in learning more about Africa. They are days of celebration, prayer, education and advocacy. AFJN was present in a formal way at this Summit and hopes to bring this event to a city near you.

### House Speaker-Elect Nancy Pelosi Visits Trinity University



On January 3<sup>rd</sup>, the day before her first day as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Speaker-elect Nancy Pelosi gathered with family, friends and colleagues at Trinity University, Pelosi's alma mater, to participate in a Mass of Remembrance for children victimized by Hurricane Katrina and the continuing violence in Darfur. Congresswoman Pelosi focused considerable energy during her last tenure in office on these two crises, and wished to mark her assumption of House leadership with a somber recognition of the grave issues our country's leaders must face and overcome. AFJN wishes to thank Congresswoman Pelosi for her continuing efforts to draw attention to the plight faced by our world's most vulnerable, particularly children.

AFJN assisted Trinity Campus Ministry in various aspects of preparation for this celebration. "Trinity's values of equality, justice and honor remind us that during moments of celebration, we must not forget those who are suffering.... Today, we join together to pray that our acts will pave the way for a more just future for all children. As a proud member of the Class of 1962, I am grateful that this fine university instilled in me a strong sense of social justice," she said.

### AFJN Permanent Address

For the past year and a half, AFJN's offices have been housed at Trinity University due to the renovations at St. Paul's College on 4<sup>th</sup> Street NE. AFJN has decided to remain at Trinity University and make the fourth floor of Trinity's Main Building its home. Therefore, our permanent address is AFJN 125 Michigan Ave NE, Washington DC 20017-1004. Please no longer use 3035 4<sup>th</sup> Street NE. The forwarding services will soon expire.

# AFJN Happenings in Brief...

### Sign-on Letters:

- To the House and Senate Appropriations Committees for funding for global AIDS, TB and malaria programs

### AFJN Events:

- Nov. 15th Northern Uganda summit at University of British Columbia
- Dec. 6th AFJN Board Meeting
- Dec. 9th Chicago Africa Summit
- Jan. 3rd Trinity University mass with Nancy Pelosi

### Advocacy Meetings:

- Hosting Bishop Paride Taban to meetings with Bush Administration, Members of Congress, and D.C.-based advocacy organizations about South Sudan

### Rallies/Demonstrations

- Save Darfur rally at Sudan Embassy

### Working Group Meetings:

- DR Congo Coalition
- Northern Uganda working group
- Advocacy Network for Africa
- Water working group
- Catholic Task Force on Africa
- Ecumenical Advocacy Days leadership

## AFJN Welcomes New Interns

We welcome three new interns to AFJN beginning in January.

**Jennifer Way** is from the University of New Hampshire and has an interest in advocacy on children's issues. **Donna Harati** is a student in the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University and has a background in communication and mediation.

**Jacques Bahati** has a Masters in Ethics from Catholic Theological Union and is interested in conflict resolution and HIV/AIDS education.

All three of these interns will provide work crucial to the success of AFJN! If you know of someone or are yourself interested in internships at AFJN, do check out our website!

**The Africa Faith and Justice Network**, inspired by the Gospel and informed by Catholic Social Teaching, educates and advocates for just relations with Africa.

Staff:  
Rocco Puopolo, s.x.  
Phil Reed

Interns:  
Jennifer Way  
Donna Harati  
Jacques Bahati

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Ph. (202) 884-9780 Fax: 202-884-9774 email: afjn@afjn.org  
<http://www.afjn.org>

*Advocacy for justice and peace in Africa doesn't just happen. AFJN needs your help and participation! Thank you for your financial support.*

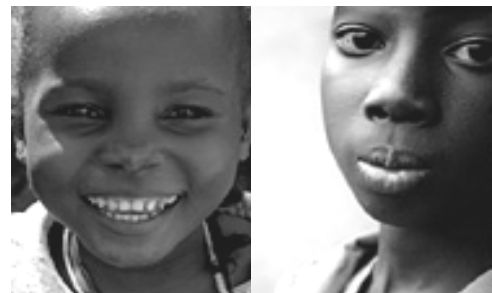
**REGISTER NOW!!**

*AFJN 2007 Annual Meeting:*

*"...and How are the Children?"*

*March 9-12*

*Washington, DC*



In conjunction with the annual **Ecumenical Advocacy Days for Global Peace With Justice**, AFJN will follow up on its 2006 conference held at the University of Notre Dame with an opportunity for AFJN members to add to their knowledge of issues that affect children across the continent, and then to lobby their elected representatives.

The Ecumenical Advocacy Days event is a joint initiative of numerous faith-based organizations. AFJN members will both participate in the Africa Track of the Ecumenical Advocacy Days and enjoy separate sessions exclusively organized for AFJN.

**Register today at: [www.advocacydays.org](http://www.advocacydays.org) (early registration until February 1)  
Click "Africa" on the "Track Selection" menu  
Or call the AFJN office at 202-884-9780**