

*Caring for AIDS Sufferers in Kenya and Uganda*

Helen O'Regan, an American rscJ working in Kenya, is an AIDS educator in the Diocese of Eldoret; she uses the Education for Life Programme, started by the Catholic Sisters in Southern Uganda and introduced to Kenya in 1998. Helen sent the following account of her work.

In 1999 the authorities of Kenya acknowledged that there were over 1.5 million individuals infected with AIDS, out of a population of approximately 30 million; there were 250,000 patients who had full-blown AIDS, and among those infected 60 per cent were between the ages of 15 and 35.

Initially the AIDS programme was based on accurate information from a medical point of view; this was my approach until in September 1998 I attended a training course in 'Education for Life', presented in a context of faith and prayer. The course members shared what their lives were like and what they would have liked them to be. Group-counselling played an important part in the programme, which was designed to bring about behavioural change, reflection on life and the acceptance of the reality of AIDS. Participants were called upon to make a commitment, to renew this from time to time and to accept ongoing evaluation. The AIDS programme in the Diocese of Eldoret focused on AIDS Awareness seminars which led into the Education for Life programme.

Helen commented:

I have sometimes given pastoral care to patients in their homes, which has brought me face to face with the ravages of the disease and its disastrous effect on all areas of life. I am always touched by the faith of those who suffer, especially the children who are so often bereaved. Truly this scourge is the leprosy of the twentieth century. Though barely a year into the programme, I feel that God is using all the gifts God gave me, and I am grateful to be of service.