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News From Maternal Life International

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Maternal Life Selected to Advance Parish Nursing in South Africa

Butte, MT – Maternal Life International (MLI), an AIDS prevention and care organization based in Butte that works to improve health care in developing countries, has been asked to develop an advanced parish nurse training program for a leading health care association in South Africa. Training will begin in later this month.

“The Catholic Health Care Association of Southern Africa, or CATHCA, received a \$220,000 grant from the South African government to create a parish nurse program for home-based health care,” said Dr. George Mulcaire-Jones, MLI’s president and medical director, and a Butte physician. “The South Africa program will be based on MLI’s successful parish nurse training model that has been operational for the past five years in Swaziland and works with seven Christian denominations in assisting with the AIDS epidemic in rural areas,” he added.

According to the United States Aid for International Development, home-based care is increasingly looked to as a more accessible and affordable alternative to in-patient care, both for patients who are unable to travel to or to pay for hospital or clinic care, and for governments that must fund in-patient facilities. “MLI has the only advanced parish nurse program in Africa, in which nurses are trained in disease diagnoses and testing, drug dispensation, and on-going community disease education and care,” Mulcaire-Jones said.

Maternal Life will fund the development of the parish nurse curriculum and the coordination and travel of a team of professionals from the United States and Swaziland to conduct the training in two South Africa locations – Durban on the east coast and Witbank in north-central South Africa.

“These high population areas have the highest prevalence rates of HIV/AIDS in the country, estimated at more than 28 percent,” Mulcaire-Jones said. “In addition to the magnitude of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, a large number of citizens are illiterate, living in poverty, and struggling to maintain daily sustenance needs such as food and shelter,” he added. “Maternal Life’s parish nurse program addresses these life issues at the community level.”

According to Mulcaire-Jones, Maternal Life’s parish nurse approach unites faith and ministry, integrating medical science and skilled nursing care with the wisdom, vitality, and moral commentary found in Christian spirituality and other faith traditions. In so doing, parish nursing can serve as a means of improving health care and delivery, engendering trust in health care systems, and providing holistic, person-centered care in resource poor areas. “Through this program, the parish nurse in South Africa will be strategically positioned to upscale HIV/AIDS related prevention, testing, treatment and palliative care,” he said.

A total of 60 South African nurses and assistants will take the first advanced parish nurse training course; the South African government grant will pay for their schooling and salaries for one year. “If additional evaluation warrants, this could be the first phase of establishing a parish nurse center in South Africa, where those who want to establish advanced parish nurse programs elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa could come for training,” Mulcaire-Jones said.

Maternal Life International is a Butte-based nonprofit dedicated to providing safe, practical, life-affirming, and innovative programs in AIDS prevention and care and in maternal health services. The nine-year-old organization partners with government, private voluntary organizations, and community- and faith-based groups for maximum results. MLI predicates health care development upon respect for the life and dignity of the human person.