

Lack of funds forces AIDS ministry network to close

CHICAGO - The National Catholic AIDS Network, which recently formed a partnership with Loyola University Chicago, has announced that it will close following its 20th annual AIDS ministry conference this summer.

The decision comes at a time when more and more people in the United States are living with HIV or AIDS, as the numbers of new infections are holding steady or rising and the death rate has gone down. The number of people living with HIV/AIDS in the United States is now estimated to be more than a million.

The network, which provides resources and support to those affected by HIV/AIDS, has fallen victim to a lack of funding, said Dan Lunney, its executive director.

"Funding has been an issue for the network for the last several years," said Mr. Lunney. "We've been very creative at reducing expenses, but the revenues were not there to support the network."

In part, the network has fallen victim to cuts at dioceses across the United States, Mr. Lunney said.

"Many dioceses and archdioceses that used to have someone doing HIV/AIDS ministry no longer do," he told The Catholic New World, newspaper of the Chicago Archdiocese. "When there is no one there dedicated to AIDS ministry, they forget the importance of what we are doing."

Many of those dioceses have stopped or cut back on support for the network, he said.

There is also a perception the AIDS crisis is no longer as urgent as it was in the 1980s and early 1990s, since medications were developed that allow HIV-positive people to live for years following infection.

But the reality is that those people need help, and there are more of them, Mr.

Lunney said.

“Federal funding for treatment has held steady,” he said, “but with more people HIV-positive, there are more people who need treatment. HIV is impacting those who do not have a voice much more than anyone else. It should be that we are more involved as a church in giving a voice to the voiceless.”

The network will hold a shortened conference July 27-29, both to celebrate the past 20 years and to look at ways that each individual can continue to contribute to AIDS ministry. Even after the office closes in August, Mr. Lunney said, there are plans to maintain a Web page to link people together.