

Celebrity in Sandals

The announcement came out in October 1979: After three nominations, the Nobel committee had finally agreed to award the Peace Prize to Mother Teresa.

Congratulations poured in from heads of state, religious leaders, and supporters all over the world, but Mother Teresa's reaction was typically self-effacing. Standing in front of the Motherhouse, she told a mob of international reporters and photographers, "I am unworthy. I accept the prize in the name of the poor. The prize is the recognition of the poor world . . . By serving the poor I am serving Him."

Mother Teresa received the Nobel Peace Prize from John Sanness, Chairman of Norway's Nobel Committee, in 1979.



That same day, an abandoned baby girl was brought to Shishu Bhavan. The sisters named her Shanti, or “peace” in Hindi, in honor of Mother Teresa’s Peace Prize.

Two months later, Mother Teresa and two other Sisters of Charity flew to Oslo, Norway, to receive the prize medal and a check for approximately \$160,000. She had made a request that the \$5,000 traditionally spent on a banquet honoring the recipient be given to the hungry instead, and another \$64,000 in donations was added by Norwegian supporters. Winters in Norway are very cold, and Mother Teresa, wearing only a gray cardigan sweater and plain black coat over her sari and sandals, cut quite a figure among the dignitaries in fur hats and coats. It was a lavish ceremony with orchestra music, and giant flower arrangements flanking the stage.

The Nobel Prizes

The Nobel Prizes were founded by wealthy inventor, scientist, and pacifist Alfred Nobel. Since 1901, an international committee has honored people for contributions to medicine, science, economics, literature, and world peace. Peace Prize recipients have included Martin Luther King Jr., the Dalai Lama, Mikhail Gorbachev, Jimmy Carter, Woodrow Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Al Gore.





Many people in the audience were shocked by the contents of Mother Teresa's Nobel Prize acceptance speech. Although the international committee represents people of every possible religious background, with a wide variety of social viewpoints, she chose to speak not only about world poverty, but also against abortion. This position has always been part of Catholic teaching, but it is a highly controversial topic that many felt she would have been wise to avoid. Mother Teresa ran into similar troubles when she advised housewives in overpopulated Egypt to "have lots and lots of children," right after the Egyptian government sponsored a series of films urging families to limit their

Pope John Paul II greets Mother Teresa and another sister who attended Mass in his private chapel.

size. Later, at a giant outdoor mass



in Knock, Ireland, she urged the crowd, "Let us promise Our Lady who loves Ireland so much that we will never allow in this country a single abortion. And no contraceptives."

In spite of this controversy, which made headlines all over the world, the Nobel Prize made Mother Teresa a household name, and brought international recognition of her work to an even higher level. Major corporations made large-scale donations of goods: A British shoe company donated leather to help lepers make shoes, and other companies sent huge quantities of food and money. Private donations increased as well, as did the number of volunteers and Co-Workers around the world.

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, Mother Teresa met with a wide array of religious leaders and heads of state, from South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu to Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat and French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. U.S. president Ronald Reagan awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the United Kingdom's Queen



The Presidential Medal of Freedom is the highest U.S. civilian award. Medals are bestowed once a year by the president of the United States.

Elizabeth II made her an honorary member of the Order of Merit. Mother Teresa also befriended England's glamorous Princess Diana, who was later dubbed "the People's Princess" because of her many contributions to charity work at home and abroad. In an interview for *Ladies' Home Journal*, Mother Teresa was quoted as saying of Diana, "Oh, she is like a daughter to me." Diana felt a similar kinship, even flying to Rome to see Mother Teresa when she was ill.

An even stranger pairing occurred when Mother Teresa met

Irish rock star Bob Geldof, lead singer of the Boomtown Rats. Geldof had produced an international rock concert called Live Aid to raise money for famine victims in Ethiopia. When he met Mother Teresa for the first time in the airport

"She is like a daughter to me," Mother Teresa said of England's Princess Diana.



Irish rock musician and activist Bob Geldof met Mother Teresa in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.



at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, he was struck by how tiny and frail she appeared, by her moral purpose

and selflessness, and by how “outrageously brilliant” she was with the international press corps: “There was nothing otherworldly or divine about her. The way she spoke to the journalists showed her to be as deft a manipulator of media as any high-powered American PR expert.” Geldof also observed: “She struck me as being the living embodiment of moral good.” The press dubbed them “the Saint and the Sinner.”

A reporter once asked Mother Teresa how it felt to be called a living saint, as she often was. Her response was characteristic: “Possibly, people see Jesus in me. But we can see Jesus in each other. Holiness is meant for all people.”

During these years, Mother Teresa also visited many international trouble spots, including some very dangerous places in the war-torn Middle East.

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—Bob Geldof

The AIDS Epidemic

Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) was first recognized by the medical community in 1981. It is a condition resulting from a virus called human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) which damages the body's immune system. HIV is contracted through direct contact with the bodily fluids of infected people. To date, it has caused more than 25 million deaths worldwide, making it one of the worst epidemics in human history.

In 1982, between attacks of artillery fire, she took a Red Cross convoy across the bombed-out city of Beirut, Lebanon, to rescue 38 severely disabled and mentally ill children who had been stranded in a mental hospital in West Beirut. Despite the danger and the language barrier, the sisters calmed these terrified children with their loving touch and the

warmth of their smiles.

While visiting Rome in 1983, Mother Teresa suffered a major heart attack. She was rushed to the hospital, where she underwent emergency surgery. Determined not to let her health problems slow her down, she continued her international outreach and travels as soon as she had recovered. One of the Missionaries of Charity's new projects involved opening hospices for AIDS patients in New York's Greenwich Village, Washington D.C., and later in San Francisco.

Mother Teresa also went to Bhopal, India, when a poisonous gas leak in an

HOSPICE

A hospice is a place or program that cares for the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the dying.



American-owned chemical company killed and injured thousands of innocent people, and to the Soviet Union in the wake of a massive nuclear accident in Chernobyl. She even secured permission for the Missionaries of Charity to work with Armenian earthquake victims in hospitals in Armenia and Moscow, the first religious mission in the Soviet Union since religious orders were banned by its government in 1918.

By the end of the decade, Mother Teresa was traveling up to 10 months of each year, leaving the Motherhouse in others' hands.

She preferred to fly coach or travel by train, usually accompanied by at least one other Missionary Sister of Charity. It was a far cry from her humble beginnings on the ground of Moti Jihl. Now Mother Teresa touched thousands of lives as her work spread around the globe.



A young boy shakes hands with Mother Teresa outside St. Paul's Church in San Francisco.