

# Candlelight vigil for AIDS marks 14 years of sadness

By Sue Harrison  
BANNER STAFF

"Fourteen years is a bitter and cruel amount of time for us to practice this memorializing of those we have lost to AIDS," said Provincetown AIDS Support Group director Len Stewart at the beginning of the service at the Universalist Meeting House that culminated the 14th annual AIDS Candlelight Memorial March early Sunday evening.

Over 100 residents gathered at St. Mary of the Harbor Church to light candles, gather banners and begin their walk through town in remembrance of friends and loved ones who have died. The marchers included teachers, children and the heads of the two Provincetown schools.

When the 20-minute walk was completed and the marchers had filed into the Meeting House, Stewart set the tone for the speakers, bringing up loss and mourning and twining them with hope and anger. Each death, he said, caused a lost thread in the fabric of our lives. He urged the listeners to keep hope alive, to face the future with determination and strength, not despair. Praising the community for the work it had done, Stewart said, "Let us make sure the job is done before we put down our tools. We've turned a few corners but the end is not yet in our grasp."



Photos Vincent Guadagno

*Marissa O'Connor, 11, of Provincetown cradles a candle during Sunday's AIDS march.*

Stewart also read a telegram from President Bill Clinton, which said in part, "I join you in mourning the lives that have been lost to HIV/AIDS and in pledging our support to those who are living with the disease."

The number of those who have died of AIDS since 1983 is nearing 300 although the yearly numbers have been decreasing since 1995. Mary Chatlos read their names, year by year, as members of the audience called out names that were not on the list.

"Honor every death, value every life," said AIDS Minister David McFarland, who remembered being told that Provincetown is a place of ghosts. Not so, he said. They are souls in eternal light that are still very much with us. "When you see that loved one, hear that loved one laugh, when you feel their presence," McFarland said, "think not that you have seen a ghost, know that you have been accompanied by an angel."

Interim Minister Bill Clark offered, "The light of hope is appearing across the horizon. Cure is the destination of hope and our only resting place is at the destination on a cure for AIDS."

Composer John Thomas wrote an original piece of music, "Illuminata," which followed the themes of illumination, peace and honor by weaving together a Tibetan Buddhist mantra, a Hindu prayer for peace and the Latin words for life, honor, exult, death, eternal and

peace. Polly Saunders accompanied on the organ with Brenda Caton on clarinet, Robin Hendrich on flute, Bruce Caton on timpani, Sylvie Richard on wind chimes and percussion, John Thomas on the Tibetan singing bowl and Raif Greco on drums. The Voices of Heaven Choir rounded out the musical offering.

PASG client Scott Jordan ended the evening saying he, like so many other people, had come here to die.

Now, years later, with the advent of drug treatments offering the cessation of symptoms and with formerly gravely ill patients coming back to near full health, a new sense of hope is being felt by everyone.

"When I went to my first AIDS vigil I vowed I would come to the last," Jordan said, and the service ended with unspoken question of how many more years would the community have to gather to remember those who had died too soon.



*About 100 people marched from St. Mary's Church to the Universalist Meeting House.*