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4300 Marsh Ridge Road • Suite 114 • Carrollton, TX 75010
972.267.1111 • 972.267.3535 (fax) • www.alarryross.com

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT:

A. Larry Ross (469) 774-6362
Kristin Cole (615) 289-6701
kristin@alarryross.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE TO:

Religion and Health Editors

KAY WARREN REVEALS SOLUTION TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: THE WORLDWIDE CHURCH, WHICH OFFERS HOPE TO THE WORLD; Warren Presents Church-based Strategy of Hope and Healing in Plenary, Workshop at Ecumenical Alliance Conference in Mexico City

MEXICO CITY, Mexico, Aug. 1 – Kay Warren, international AIDS advocate, author and director of the HIV/AIDS Initiative at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif., today addressed the plenary session of the Ecumenical Alliance Pre-Conference in Mexico City, offering hope for the problem of gender-base violence through the Church. In a follow-up workshop, husband Rick Warren and colleagues joined in presenting a workshop on the role of the Church in HIV/AIDS.

“If gender-based violence is everywhere, so is the Church,” Warren said. “The Church is the hope of the world, and God’s plan for dealing with the problems of the world. Whether dealing with violence, poverty, orphans or AIDS – if we don’t start with the church, we are starting at the wrong end of the equation.”

The plenary focused on dynamics of gender-based violence and trafficking. Joining Warren on the program were Dr. Pauline Muchina, senior partnership adviser, UNAIDS; Dr. Hernán Quezada, HIV advisor to Catholic churches in Mexico; and Heryln Marja Uiras of Churches United Against HIV and AIDS in Southern and Eastern Africa (CUAHA).

Warren addressed the crowd last, and while each of the other presenters gave important stories and statistics about the crisis of gender-based violence and trafficking, she offered a solution for using the worldwide network of the Church to stop the problem.

“Violence against women is everywhere,” Warren said. “Where I live in the U.S., we tend to be quiet about it. It is not socially acceptable; we don’t talk about it. But just because it is hidden or quiet, doesn’t make it right. From Cambodia to Rwanda to women in my own church, it is everywhere.”

She continued to speak about her own personal experience of being sexually molested as a child by a family friend. Afterward, Warren said she felt ashamed and alone. Like many other women and young girls around the world who are victims of gender-based violence, she had no one to whom she could turn or with whom she could speak about her situation – especially in her church, so she remained silent.

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“We have to ask ourselves, ‘What can the church do?’” Warren continued. “There is only so much governments, NGOs and relief organizations can do. We have to speak up for those who have no voice.”

Warren described three unique characteristics of the Church that enables it to be the answer – the Truth of the Scriptures that sets us free from our hurts, habits and hang ups; the Spirit of God who convicts us of sin and then gives us the power to change our hearts, attitudes and behaviors; and the people of God that are part of a healing community that can link together and be willing to live authentic, vulnerable lives of transparency and accountability.

The model for this solution is The P.E.A.C.E. Plan – a 50-year strategy to mobilize millions of local churches around the world to address five global problems: spiritual emptiness, corrupt leadership, poverty, disease and illiteracy. Launched at Saddleback Church by Warren and her husband Rick, prototypes of the Plan have been tested the past four years in 68 countries, and as a result, the P.E.A.C.E. Coalition, involving business, church and government partnerships, was launched in April.

Following her plenary remarks to addressing the Church’s leadership and willingness to respond to HIV/AIDS, in an afternoon workshop, the Warrens and their team outlined the specific role the church can play in making a difference, along the acronym “C.H.U.R.C.H.”

This blueprint involves six things that any and every church can do to provide hope and healing for this life-defining diagnosis, including: Care for and support the sick; Handle HIV testing and counseling; Unleash a volunteer force of compassion; Remove the Stigma; Champion Healthy Behavior; and Help with HIV medication (ARV’s).

The Warrens observed that many individuals and organizations are working to manage HIV/AIDS, which they summarize as S.L.O.W.: Support correct and consistent condom use; Limit number of sexual partners; Offer needle exchange, where permissible; and Wait for sexual debut.

However, the Warrens further challenged that ending AIDS requires a strategy defined by S.T.O.P.: Save sex for marriage; Train men to respect women and girls; Open the door for churches to support care and treatment; and Partner with one person for life through marriage.

The Ecumenical Alliance Pre-Conference is held in conjunction with the XVII International AIDS Conference in Mexico City, Aug. 3-8. Along with attending, Warren will continue her involvement through speaking at satellite events, including a Sunday morning worship service.

Founded in 1980 by the Warrens, Saddleback Church is located in Orange County, Calif. With an average weekly attendance of 22,000, it is one of the five largest churches in America. For more information about the Saddleback HIV/AIDS Initiative, visit www.HIVandTheChurch.com.