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Thousands of Bereaved Families, Friends to Remember Children during Worldwide Candle Lighting Sunday

With a new year around the corner, bereaved families the world over are joining with relatives and friends Sunday, December 14 to remember with love children whose deaths have left a pale over the lives of those left behind.

Every year on the second Sunday in December at 7 p.m. local time, candles are lit for one hour during The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting, creating a virtual wave of light starting at the International Date Line and traveling west. Hundreds of formal candle lightings are planned around the world and thousands more will be held informally in homes by families as they pay tribute to the memory of a special child.

“This is the seventh year for this important time of remembrance,” says Patricia Loder, executive director of The Compassionate Friends. “Our numbers, unfortunately, grow larger every year as the newly bereaved join the ranks of those whose children died in the past and, together, all seek a way of having their children remembered.”

In 2003 alone, nearly 200,000 infants, children, teenagers, and young adults will have died in the United States, with almost a million families facing either a stillbirth or an early pregnancy loss.

“The Worldwide Candle Lighting is one way that we try to bring light out of darkness,” says Mrs. Loder. “This event has truly taken on a life of its own. Last year on our Web site, during the Worldwide Candle Lighting, we received remembrance messages from all over the world, some of them in their native language, indicating the true international unity that the event brings.”

This year’s candle lighting has even reached into Iraq as a service is planned at the Presidential Palace in Baghdad for military personnel who are stationed in Iraq, but are dealing with the personal loss of children or siblings within their families.

“We also should not forget that every time a soldier dies during the war, there are usually parents and siblings left behind to mourn their loss,” says Mrs. Loder. “Everyone is someone’s child, and we are providing a way that *their light may always shine.*”

In conjunction with the Worldwide Candle Lighting, the United States Senate unanimously passed resolution 196, proclaiming December 14, 2003 as National Children’s Memorial Day.

The Compassionate Friends has a presence in an estimated 29 countries around the world with nearly 600 chapters in the United States alone, serving all 50 states plus Puerto Rico and the Cayman Islands.

Persons interested in attending a Worldwide Candle Lighting service near them or receiving more information about The Compassionate Friends may call toll-free 877-969-0010 or visit the TCF Web site at www.compassionatefriends.org.