

## **To Assignment, News and Features Editors: AMMA, Celebrated Humanitarian and 'Hugging Saint' to Receive Thousands at LAX Hilton, June 16-17**

*Los Angeles, CA -- Reputed as a tireless humanitarian, Mata Amritanandamayi, better known as "Amma" or "Ammachi," visits Los Angeles as part of a 10-city U.S. tour offering free public programs June 16 and 17, where she will receive thousands with her blessing-a healing embrace. Programs take place at the Hilton Los Angeles Airport, on 5711 West Century Blvd.*

Los Angeles, CA ([PRWeb](#)) June 17, 2008 -- Reputed as a tireless humanitarian, Mata Amritanandamayi, better known as "Amma" or "Ammachi," visits Los Angeles as part of a 10-city U.S. tour offering free public programs June 16 and 17, where she will receive thousands with her blessing-a healing embrace. Programs take place at the Hilton Los Angeles Airport, on 5711 West Century Blvd.

Considered a living Saint in her homeland of India, Amma (54) has quietly gained an extraordinary reputation over the last 30 years as a result of the extensive charitable institutions she has established and for her personal outreach. The recipient of numerous humanitarian awards, Amma sleeps merely a couple hours per day, teaching by the constant example of her own life that is dedicated to selfless social service. In a widely acclaimed CBS TV Primetime Special entitled In God's Name, Amma was profiled as a representative of one the world's twelve most influential religious leaders. Amma was the only woman; the others included Pope Benedict XVI, the Dalai Lama, the Grand Rabbi of Jerusalem, the Grand Ayatollah, and the Archbishop of Canterbury. In a subsequent Times of London, ranking, Amma was included as one the world's ten most powerful religious figures.

"Mata Amritanandamayi...is fast becoming a world-renowned spiritual leader like Mother Teresa or Mohandas Gandhi." -Reuters News

Hilton at LAX: Free Public Programs: Darshan.

It is expected that Amma will receive thousands for darshan, a Sanskrit term describing "audience in the presence of a holy person". In a significant departure from ancient tradition particularly as a woman, Amma's darshan consists of a tender embrace. She has been doing this as a natural expression of compassion since she was a teen. It is estimated that Amma has given over 27 million hugs in her life. In India, vast crowds usually assemble to the point where Amma may individually receive and hug over 40,000 people in a continuous sitting. She will never turn anyone away, nor charge any money. The international press has dubbed her "The Hugging Saint".

Humanitarian Institutions: "Compassion to the poor is our duty to God"

With official NGO status granted by the U.N., Amma oversees a vast network of volunteer humanitarian activities of three distinct types: 1) direct aid to the needy, 2) educational institutions designed to help the underprivileged learn to help themselves, and 3) social programs that serve broader society and the environment. The list of endeavors is remarkably long, ranging from 1300-bed charitable hospitals, to the building of over 100,000 homes for the poor, to orphanages, pensions for widows, hospices, a wide array of subsidized schools, to Green Friends, an environmental youth program, whereby over 150,000 tree saplings are planted annually. New charitable activities are created rapidly and regularly around the world by volunteers, inspired by Amma's example. For more information, please visit [www.Amma.org](http://www.Amma.org).

Since 2001, following the devastating earthquakes that rocked the Gujarat regions of India, Amma emerged as a leading figure in disaster relief. Through her charitable trust, three razed villages were entirely rebuilt. In 2004, her efforts towards Tsunami Relief made international headlines (World News Tonight with Peter Jennings, BBC

News, and New York Times) as over \$50 million has been contributed to that cause. In the U.S., a million dollar aid donation was given to the Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund.

**\*\*Epidemic of Farmer Suicides:** In 2007, Amma pledged \$46 million to help tackle an alarming trend of suicides afflicting indebted farmers in parts of India. Caught in a vicious cycle of failing crop prices and aggressive money lenders, thousands of farmers each year resort to suicide. In many cases, before taking their own lives, the farmer will also kill off his entire family in a desperate attempt to shield them from the shame and harassment of debt collectors. "Suicide is never a way out; counseling and education could really help them (the farmers) get through to the other side", says Amma.

#### Personal History

Born in 1953, the daughter of a poor fisherman in the Indian state of Kerala, Amma has heeded the call to help others since early childhood. At the age of ten, her schooling ended abruptly as she was forced into arduous family chores. Though frequently mistreated, it is said that Amma dwelt in constant remembrance of God and never complained, except when she adamantly refused to be married-off. So deeply misunderstood, she became such a source of family embarrassment to the point where one member attempted to kill her.

A profoundly rare mystic at young age, Amma began to attract crowds drawn to her God-intoxicated states and compassionate outreach. Confronting traditional religious culture, Amma drew criticism for her unconventional behavior, as there is no precedent of a single woman--even a holy woman--embracing strangers. But Amma did not waver from her approach, and eventually former detractors became supporters. In later years Amma once again broke with the male-dominated religious customs by allowing women to serve as priests in the prayer temple. "Women too love God", Amma refuted.

#### Unity of all great religions

Though born into the Hindu faith, Amma steadfastly supports all great religions, encouraging aspirants to go deeper in their own traditional path. "There is no harm in having many religions and faiths", she says, "but it is harmful to think they are different, and that one faith is higher and another lower." In her speech at the U.N., Amma described the real source of historical world conflict as "lack of awareness of our true nature". "My religion is love", Amma often says.

#### Recognition in the West

In 1993 Amma was a selected President at the Centenary Parliament of World Religions in Chicago and in 1995 was a keynote speaker at the United Nations 50th Anniversary Commemoration. At the invitation of U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, Amma addressed the U.N. at The Millennium World Peace Summit, in 2000 as part of a select delegation of "preeminent religious and spiritual leaders". In 2002, Amma was greeted by a roaring standing ovation at the U.N. in Geneva upon being recognized with the Gandhi-King Award for Non-Violence, an award previously given to Nelson Mandela, Kofi Annan, and Dr. Jane Goodall.

Amma was the closing plenary at the 2004 Parliament of the World's Religions in Barcelona, and in recognition of her efforts in disaster relief, received the James Parks Morton Award in 2006 along with Nobel Laureate Mohamed ElBaradei, Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer, and actor-activist Richard Gere. This award had previously been given to Bishop Desmond Tutu, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and President Bill Clinton.

Amma has received various commendations from the City and County of Los Angeles recognizing her humanitarian activities.

PROGRAM INFO: JUNE 16 & 17, Morning sessions begin at 10am. Evening sessions begin at 7:30PM. Hilton Los Angeles Airport, 5711 West Century Blvd. Exceptionally, an intimate Retreat with Amma (pre-registration is required. Visit [www.amma.org](http://www.amma.org)) takes place June 18-20 at LAX Hilton followed by a final free public program beginning at 7pm on June 20.

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In a time when newswires are dominated by stories of crime and war, it is inspiring to know there are stories of distinguished spiritual leaders such as the Dalai Lama, Mahatma Gandhi, and the late Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who remind us of what is beautiful and deep about the human spirit.

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