

# CAPS Newsletter Special Anniversary Edition



2003

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2013



Cover Photo—World Aids Quilt on the Mall in Washington DC

# Catholics for Aids Prevention and Support

## Chairman's Message-

### A Decade of HIV Ministry: Something Worth Doing?

This year we can celebrate achievements and milestones in the continuing story of HIV and AIDS. The first ever instance of a themed global health day, was the first World AIDS Day (WAD) held in 1988, so this year is the silver jubilee of WAD. The crisis of AIDS gave the world a whole new way of raising awareness around important issues, and a creative approach to campaigning, which has been replicated for so many varied causes.

This year also marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CAPS, and 2014 the 10<sup>th</sup> year of the Positive Catholics (PC) peer ministry. The crisis of faith in the face of HIV has given birth to the only national pastoral ministry for people living with HIV. More remarkable, is that the PC Ministry has developed and grown because of the faith commitment of people living with HIV. All that has been done, has been done by volunteers – ‘positive people’ and supporters, who have given willingly of their time and talents in service for others, often with little recognition, sometimes at personal cost. Discipleship can be precarious.

**World Aids Day 2013**  
25th anniversary of the first  
observance of World's Aids day



## Inside this issue

### Annual Report:

Pastoral Ministry.....4

Society and Church..... 5

News & Appeals.....6

Ten Year £10 Appeal.....7

### Douai Experiences

- Love in Action.....8

- Fruits of Douai...10

- Feedback.....11

Focus on the Poor.....12

### Obituaries:

Brian McEvoy.....9

‘Laurie’ (of SWLF).....11

WAD Services.....11

Prayer Resources Throughout

## **A Decade of HIV Ministry: Something Worth Doing?**

So this is an important birthday year. How wonderful that the PC ministry has grown from around 12 members in 2004, to around 350 individuals and families today, throughout the country. In this newsletter you will see short reports from our members in the PC groups in Manchester and London; the Life group in Essex; and the South West London Fellowship (SWLF) group. We also include articles and feedback from participants of our Douai Summer Retreats, which we hope you will find inspiring. We thank God for each person who has contributed – for the witness to God’s love for us through those living with HIV, and the solidarity and fellowship offered by our benefactors and supporters. How wonderful that so many people have found compassion, healing and strength from the love of others in action. Looking to the future, CAPS Trustees have realised that whilst our fragile pastoral ministry continues to grow, there is the challenge of sustainability. Our peer support groups and networks remain very much a ‘fellowship of the weak and vulnerable’. Many are materially poor, unwaged, single parents, asylum seekers, suffering with health complications, dealing with debt or insecure housing; the list could go on, and on. There comes a point when relying

solely on volunteers has to be reconsidered. The late Fr. Wilbur Boswell used to say, with a wide and generous smile: “if something is worth doing, then it is worth doing badly”. There is wisdom in that. Think about it. He meant that worthwhile matters are always worth pursuing. I am not claiming that what we do in CAPS and PC is done ‘badly’, far from it, but it is true to say that what we do is sometimes incomplete. There remains so much more to be done.

Not least, CAPS also has a mission to raise awareness and educate others. Rising rates of sexually transmitted infections, especially amongst the young, and rates of late HIV diagnosis, should concern us all.

### ***Worship Resources***

***Our sisters and brothers from the evangelical traditions shared this inspiring song of faith with us during our Douai Retreats.***

*“God will make a way,  
Where there seems to be no way,  
He works in ways we cannot see,  
He will make a way for me  
He will be my guide.  
Hold me closely to His side,  
With love and strength for each new day,  
He will make a way.  
He will make a way  
Oh, God will make a way.”*

*(From God Will Make a Way: The best of Don Moen.  
Sony Music 2003)*

## A Decade of HIV Ministry: Something Worth Doing?

How are we preparing our young people to navigate their relationships in our society as it is? Why is church still a place where HIV stigma persists and those infected or affected too often remain silenced and isolated?

Two final compelling reasons convince us that our mission and ministry matters in and for the church:

- ◆ The PC model of community can be of some positive witness. Shared vulnerabilities and social isolation compel us to return to the fundamentals of our faith. Considering Baptism reminds us of our dignity as daughters and sons of God, and counteracts stigma. Living our Baptism renews our commitment to each other as sisters and brothers in Christ. Differences and barriers are overcome, and we are transformed by each other. Awareness of mortality and reliance on God lead us away from childish things, and childish understandings of God, towards a fuller embracing of Discipleship, and an adult commitment to follow Christ.
- ◆ We believe that God is with us to help us, and the wider church, to address uncomfortable issues related to HIV which we usually prefer to ignore: namely those around sex and sexuality; gender inequality; racism; extremes of poverty; immigration and asylum – issues which coincide in the lives of our PC members. By

acknowledging people living with HIV in our midst we can all learn from, and be transformed by the Christ living with HIV who presents himself to us through them. With the help of God, maybe we will go on for another 10 years, because, as Fr. Boswell used to say, if something is worth doing.....



Cafod HIV Team

## How long, Lord?: a lament

By Vincent Manning

So far still so present:  
AIDS and HIV

How long, Lord, shall  
we wait?  
How long for healing?  
How long for justice?  
How long for love?  
How long for your  
comfort  
affirmation  
acceptance?

How long, Lord, how  
long?

How long to hear  
words  
and feel the actions  
of Christ present in our  
church,  
to know not judgment,  
only love,  
not condemnation, on-  
ly embrace?

How long, Lord, how  
long

must we suffer at the  
hands of men  
who subjugate us to  
their will,  
who tell us to be still  
and chastise us when  
we resist?

(Cont'd pages 5 and 7 –From 'Like  
Leaves to the Sun: Prayers from  
the Iona Community' 2013)

## Annual Report – Pastoral Support

CAPS is now one of the largest providers of HIV peer support groups in London. CAPS is the only national Christian network of PLWH.

### Faith Based Peer Support

Nationally our faith based peer support groups now have around 230 members registered with us. Each member has a family, many have children, so our actual estimated membership is much larger.

**PC London** has continued to meet on a monthly basis. We continue to receive new members. Some members attend very regularly, others attend as and when they are able. Rosie also arranged a Family Day out during school holidays for parents and children, which was appreciated and enjoyed by all.

**PC Manchester** also continues to meet monthly. Registered members are now in the region of 50 members, again, actual recipients of support are more numerous. PC Manchester hopes to find the resources and a suitable facility to arrange their own Retreat weekend, closer to the North of England.

**The LIFE group** has been running now for more than a year (see article by Hannah) in Essex. From small beginnings in faith upwards of 15 people are now meeting monthly for mutual support. More than any other single happening over the past year, the LIFE group is surely a sign of the relevance of peer support, and of the Holy Spirit moving with us. By their fruits you will know them (Mt.7:16-20).

### General Peer Support – The South West London Fellowship Group (SWLF)

In autumn 2012 CAPS was approached by an existing (secular) peer support group in South London who faced closure when their previous supporting organisation (Milestones) decided that they could not continue to run the group. The members asked CAPS trustees if we could 'run' the group instead, and we answered no. However, we felt that we could support the members to run their own group, and so from January to March 2013 we helped the group transition to a new 'self managing' model of peer support. Members worked exceptionally hard to reconsider why they meet; what the benefits are for them; and establish a clear agreement as to their ethos and values. They have devised a new model which involves a 'revolving' leadership team of six members, each taking responsibility for aspects of the group for a 3-6 month period. They had a total registered membership of around 250 people, but many had drifted away. SWLF now has 70 individuals registered since January, and receives new members referred by St. George's hospital, Tooting, and other agencies. All people living with HIV will receive a generous and warm welcome to join this inclusive group which meets weekly on Mondays to meet, eat and learn together. (See Obituary for 'Laurie' in this issue).

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*"By their fruits you will know them" (Mt.7:16-20)*

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### Support for individuals

Our volunteers have supported a number of individuals this year. We have assisted several people with asylum applications and others with housing and employment issues. We have networked to provide others with spiritual guidance and counselling. Our capacity to help is limited, but we do what we can to respond flexibly and sensitively to each person, accepting them 'where they are'.

### Retreat Weekends

We have held weekend retreats again this year during the Spring, Summer and Autumn at Bainesbury House, Downside, and Douai Abbey. A total of 40 adults and 10 children made retreats this year.

## Annual Report – Raising Awareness in Society and Church

CAPS continues to respond to requests for input from secular and faith organisations. Our capacity is limited, but we think that we can be proud that we have been present in many different settings this year. We raise awareness of the connections between Christian faith and HIV, and spread the Gospel message.

In collaboration with the Metro Centre, CAPS organised a consultation of PLWH regarding peer support. We have offered our findings as evidence to NHS commissioners who decide what services should receive funding in the future. The report 'South London HIV Peer Support' argues strongly that HIV peer support remains essential, and promotes the views of people living with HIV in accordance with the principle of Meaningful Involvement in services design and delivery. See report at [www.caps-uk.org](http://www.caps-uk.org)

Members have contributed to the NAZ sexual health project 'Testing Faith' training program intended to raise awareness among Christian and Muslim clergy. High rates of late diagnosis in African communities mean that there is much that could be done within the Black faith communities. Archbishop Peter Smith has written a foreword of support. For further details contact NAZ on 020 8741 1879.

We gave a presentation to staff and students at Roehampton University.

Members provided leaflets and outreach during the South London HIV Fair health promotion event in Waterloo.

The CAPS Chairman met with Susie Grady the new Policy Adviser to the All Parliamentary Group on HIV and AIDS. We attended '**Taking Stock: Commissioning & the New Public Health System Six Months in**' at the House of Lords; and members of SWLF represented CAPS at the Caritas Parliamentary Reception hosted by Lord Alton.

CAPS have successfully argued for the inclusion of 'Religion' as a significant category in data collection exercises as part of the South London HIV Partnership (SLHP).

CAPS co-facilitated a workshop during the 'LoveSpirit Festival' on 'Transformation through Healing'. The festival held in London during October brought together over 200 people of different ideas, faiths, and belief systems, under one roof – all seekers of God.

With Housing Justice CAPS investigated issues around HIV and Housing. The report is available on the Resources page on [www.caps-uk.org](http://www.caps-uk.org)

### How long, Lord?: a lament cont'd

How long, Lord, how long must we be silent?

For fear of prejudice and blame.

For fear of disturbance in the body of the pure.

How long, Lord, how long must we wait to feel that sex is good and the body holy, for disgust to depart, to delight in touch without fear?

How long, Lord, how long?

We wait for food, Lord. To share the bread and the cup that you promised.

We are forgotten, Lord. Our suffering, our dying in vain. Your people do not see us.

They do not hear us: cast out by silence. Made invisible with a pill.

How long, Lord, how long must we endure talk of righteousness and blame?

Of reward and punishment?

Of innocence and guilt? The deceiver speaks from the pulpit words to keep us from your Love.

## Annual Report continued

Fr. John Sherrington, CP and the Chairperson accepted the invitation to join Cafod's HIV Advisory group. The Chair has attended meetings this year, and gave input for Cafod international staff on HIV Peer Support and Faith, during their training week in London this summer.

CAPS members were present for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary Pan African Catholic Chaplaincy Mass at St. Georges Cathedral in September. The Chairperson gave a presentation on the Positive Catholics ministry in the Amigo Hall.

We made short presentations at Corpus Christi Church, Brixton, contributing to the National Board of Catholic Women sponsored '**Solidarity with the Poor**' fact finding project, seeking to understand how welfare cuts are impacting and how poverty is being manifest around the country.

CAPS has co-sponsored 'Taking a Chance on God': A day-long workshop for LGBT Christians and friends at St. Martin in the Fields - Trafalgar Square, London, in November. This ecumenical gathering of over 100 ministers and lay people from all over the UK and Ireland, considered what God is asking of LGBT people in the church today? The day included the UK Premier showing of the documentary film 'Taking a Chance on God' about the life and ministry of former Jesuit priest and theologian John McNeill. Theological reflection in small groups was aided by short inputs from James Alison, Nicola Slee, Clare Herbert, Bernard Lynch, and Sharon Ferguson. We had to increase the number of places when the 80 original tickets sold out within hours of publicity being released, and many more who wished to attend were disappointed. CAPS Trustees consider that by addressing issues of ministry by and for LGBT

Christians this event has raised awareness of important dimensions of HIV prevention.

### Other News – New Patrons

During this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Beatification of Blessed Dominic Barberi by Pope Paul VI, we are delighted that Passionist Provincial Rev. John Kearns, CP has agreed to become our Patron. Blessed Dominic was the first Passionist to come to England and was famous for his preaching, and for receiving Blessed John Henry Newman into the Roman Catholic Church. The Passionist charism and spirituality of Christ's Passion has been influential in the Positive Catholics ministry.

We also welcome David and Rachel Christie-Davies and their family, who have long been supporters, as Patrons this year. We also welcome Archbishop Peter Smith as a new Patron this year. It is especially fitting that Archbishop Peter should witness publicly to our Church's solidarity with and love for people living with HIV, as he serves the Diocese with the highest rates of HIV infection in the country. We rely on our Patrons for guidance and encouragement.

### Sustainable development and a call for volunteers

CAPS Trustees are seeking sustainable ways to develop our ministry, and become a more effective agent in meeting the contemporary challenges of HIV and AIDS, and a more faithful witness to God's presence, love and justice. To this end we have formed three sub groups: to develop our presence as educators; to explore options to meet the needs of PLWH who are homeless; and to enhance our fundraising capability. We need able and skilled people to help us in this task.

Do you have skills to offer in marketing; research; policy writing; computing; media or press; finance or fundraising?

## Annual Report - Other News continued

Do you have experience within the HIV sector? Perhaps you could help us in fulfilling our mission in organisational development, or in support of our pastoral ministry.

We are also appealing for a suitable building to use as a base for the peer support ministries, and as an operational HQ.

If you feel inspired by what you read in this newsletter, please consider helping us. Please contact Vincent at [chair@caps-uk.org](mailto:chair@caps-uk.org) to arrange a conversation.

### Other News – Sustainable development and a call for donations

CAPS has been supported financially by a number of small grants over the last 10 years. We are grateful to all who have supported us. We have also received £3k each year from NHS funding sources, and this year that has increased substantially as we have received additional funding to support the SWLF. With changes in the NHS and cuts to services our NHS funding will end in March 2014.

Since we began operating our annual income has risen from under £1k to just under £16k (to end of year March 2012). We think that we have been responsible stewards, and with subsidies, volunteers and donations in kind, we think we have achieved a great deal for such relatively small amounts of money.

We estimate that to sustain present basic levels of service and ministry we will need to secure around £18k in 2014. We expect to be able to raise some of this from grants. However, as a church, as a community, we think that we should not be relying upon the State to provide financial support for this ministry. Will you help?

#### The Ten Year £10 Appeal.

In this our 10<sup>th</sup> year we appeal for £10 a month from 1000 Christians which will meet approximately half our present costs of ministry.

If you have felt encouraged in your faith, please consider donating what you can afford to support us on a monthly basis. We currently have a secure pay pal facility via our website. Alternatively you can instruct your bank to send donations to:

CAPS – HSBC Bank –  
Sort Code: 40 – 04 – 10 –  
Account No. 81410512

If you set up a direct debit please send a notifying email to [info@caps-uk.org](mailto:info@caps-uk.org) so that we can thank you and arrange to claim tax back on your donation.

#### How long, Lord?: a lament cont'd

How long, Lord, how long?

How long will our children be taught only no, still wanting to understand how to be yes to love?

How long, Lord, how long?

When will our fear give way, Lord?  
When will we be free?

When will we believe that all is good and you are in all and that you want nothing from us but love – wish nothing for us but love?

How long, Lord, how long?

To feel embraced and know that you are with us,  
between us,  
in us,  
as we stumble toward love,  
and enjoy our fumbling as our learning,  
our stumbling as our growing,  
and know all love is loving  
when loving with you?

*“We believe that you are God -born to set your people free. Became the final sacrifice - conquered death to bring us life.”  
(From the song by Aaron Shust – This is what we believe)*

As I was driving to the shops listening to this song it spoke directly to my heart and told me my story of our Douai experience.



A special thank you also to our young 8 year old friend who we met this year, for sharing with us what his Nigerian name means: ‘Jesus is enough for me’ – Amen to that!

## Seeing Love in Action by Rachel

We come as a family to look after the children of the retreatants. We come to serve. Yet every year without fail we are served, by our friend Jesus, through the retreatants, and through their children. We benefit as a family by coming to Douai and being alongside others from so many different walks of life, different ages, different colours, different sexualities, different nationalities etc. All so different yet we are united in our belief that we are all God’s people and that Jesus was born to set us free. Free from shame, free from sin, free from fear, free from anxiety. Each person there has his or her own story – each of us suffers from the human condition of living within the tension of choosing to trust in God or choosing to trust in ourselves.

The children at Douai further remind us all that Jesus came not just to give us life but to give us life in all abundance. If you want to see life in abundance take a gang of children to a farm for the afternoon! Feeding the animals, seeing new-born piglets, daring to go down the highest vertical slide, going on a tractor ride for the first time -the way that children embrace life is always

a reminder to be more like them. Find joy in God’s creation – this is the way life is meant to be – in the moment, practising the presence of God and free!

To see the way in which people share and encourage each other throughout the weekend is humbling and it is always a blessing to witness love in action. Jesus commands us to love each other and the bible reminds us that love must not be words or speech but must be true love which shows itself in action. Douai for me is like seeing love in action.

A weekend ‘working’ at Douai looks like this: we get to be with our brothers and sisters in Christ and we sing, pray and worship as we remember that God has set us free; we get to be reminded of how to live abundantly, by the children, and we get reminded of what love in action looks like. In turn we hope that by ‘giving’ our time to look after the children the retreatants have some valuable space to discuss and share openly. We hope that is us loving you in action!

So finally I would like to say thank you to all the retreatants who allow us to share the weekend with them.

## A Tribute to Brian McEvoy by Alan Hawkins

Brian was born just over 71 years ago in Mountmellick, County Laois, Ireland.

Like so many others, the McEvoy family emigrated to England in 1948. In 1960 Brian went to the English College in Rome to train for the priesthood. His love for Rome would stay with him for the rest of his life. After ordination, Brian returned to England and began his life as a Parish Priest, Journalist, Chaplain, Confidant, Tourist Guide, Canon.

Throughout his ministry Brian provided great support for the sick and dying, with whom he had a special affinity. In the 1980's and early 90's when HIV / Aids was being identified for the first time and many doctors, nurses, and other health professionals treated positive people as lepers, insisting on being totally gowned up complete with boots, gloves and masks, Brian had none of this and offered his pastoral care to the bereaved and suffering with great tenderness. He was respected for his being so "Christ like" - a term which was used by many who sought comfort and / or the sacraments from him.

*" Brian offered his pastoral care to the bereaved and suffering with great tenderness"*

No 4 Harley Street, Bath was a feature of Brian's life since the late 1950s, first as his parents' home and then from 1985 as his home and open house, from where he served the parishioners of St Mary's. Many experienced his hospitality at No 4 at first hand - the intoxicating mixture of serious debate, uncontrollable laughter and warm welcome. Brian offered a welcome to members of the Positive Catholics community on many occasions, especially when on route to or returning from weekend retreats at Downside Abbey.

Brian's life has had more than its fair share of suffering here on earth with spondylitis and colon cancer which crippled him for years, which he bore with cheerful optimism and good humour.

From 1985 until Sunday 2nd September 2012 Brian ministered from St Mary's Parish. Having celebrated his last Masses there he moved from 'No 4' to St. John's Hospital sheltered accommodation in the centre of Bath, and remained there until he was relieved of his suffering and was taken home by the Lord on 27th July 2013



The following is a prayer from "We Live", one of the booklets written by Brian when he worked at The Catholic Enquiry Office .

"Lord God,  
help me in my search  
to know you,  
the one true God,  
and Jesus Christ whom  
you have sent.  
Teach me by your Holy  
Spirit what to believe,  
what to do,  
and how best to live  
my life. Amen".

## Hannah - The fruits of the Douai Experience: 2012 & 2013

I distinctly remember my first encounter with Positive Catholics! I had been diagnosed with HIV for four years and was becoming increasingly frustrated by the church's lack of awareness and concern for people like me. Through research I finally discovered Positive Catholics and made contact with Vincent, whose passion and determination about the mutual support people of faith can give each other, especially when living with HIV, I remember to this day. It was this, with the love and acceptance I felt through this single telephone conversation that spurred me on to sign up to attend the Douai retreat in August 2012. I didn't know anyone who would be there and I wondered what I was really doing going away with my son to something I knew so little about. But God obviously had a purpose in it! Everyone there was so welcoming and friendly and I really enjoyed having the space to be myself, to be honest and open and to be encouraged by new, wonderful friends. Douai gave me the time to laugh and cry, to be quiet and listen, and to minister to others. I felt loved and special and completely accepted as part of the Positive Catholics family even though I had never attended the London or Manchester groups. The accommodation was so comfortable and the location beautiful and the fact that the children's work was so fantastic was the icing on the cake.

On the journey home from Reading God really put in my heart to start a similar group in Essex, not just for myself but for those people living with HIV who didn't feel welcomed or understood by the church. I had no idea how to go about it but a timely phone call from the Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) in Essex led me to become a volunteer. I was nervous about suggesting starting a Christian group but the staff at THT leapt at the chance and the first meeting of the 'LIFE' group was only two months after my experience at Douai. I felt LIFE was an appropriate name for the group as the word LIFE is in the THT subheading because it summed up everything that God calls us to: not only faith in Jesus but *"having life and having it to the full!" (John 10:10)*

From the first meeting we have consistently had an average of eight attendees with fifteen regular members who are committed to the group. We follow the Positive Catholics model with every meeting following the same pattern of sharing our stories, food and praying together. Basically we Meet, Eat and Pray! We also have socials at Christmas, Easter and in the summer. Vincent and Positive Catholics have been instrumental in supporting me and encouraging me not to be swayed by other agendas but to keep to the original vision and I am so proud that the LIFE group is part of the Positive Catholics family and that it continues to go from strength to strength.

*"son still says that the weekend away is the highlight of his summer holiday!"*

As the Douai 2013 retreat approached I knew without a doubt that I and my son would be attending but that I wanted to take some members of the LIFE group. As my experience the year before had been so inspiring I wanted some of the core members to catch some more of the Positive Catholics vision and become instrumental in developing the group in Essex. Three people were chosen to attend, and we all found our experience fruitful. We returned home inspired, singing hymns of praise to God, and confirmed in our commitment to each other.

Reflecting on the twelve months from Douai 2012 to Douai 2013 I am amazed at how much God has done! Douai did in many ways change my life – it gave me the confidence to push forward with a Christian support group but also to pursue positive speaking in schools and churches as well as develop my own career and business. I am sure that many of my Positive Catholics friends will be friends for life and I am excited to see what the next year has in store!

## Douai Retreat Feedback

*'The retreat was very useful, well organised and fruitful. I have been blessed. It is wonderful to know that people believe in Jesus, who is our Anchor, strength, pillar in times of storm like this.'*

*"It was very interesting and it really helped me. It was great to meet so many different people and I learnt a lot about how to live my life and deal with different situations."*

*'Experience very encouraging: In terms of faith very powerful. Time has been good and nurturing. Experience of living with HIV becomes an easy part of life.'*



*'My expectations were met. I got to know the members very closely as I was afraid I wouldn't get to know so many people and remember their names. Wonderful, joyous people despite their very painful stories. I received so much from each and everyone. Great to have so many beautiful happy children with us.'*

## Rest in peace – good and faithful friend

*(This man's family never knew of his HIV infection, or his membership of this peer support group. His name has been changed to protect the family from unintended upset)*

This year a leading member of the South West London Fellowship (SWLF) peer support group died after months in hospital, following complications with his treatment for HIV. 'Laurie' was a special person. In 2012, when the SWLF lost its former management team, and before CAPS offered support, Laurie was one of those who kept things going. Without his leadership and commitment the group may well have closed. He had received much support himself from the group in previous years. In turn he was determined that the group would continue so that others could be helped to meet the challenges of an HIV diagnosis. During the months he spent in hospital group members visited him regularly, and attended his funeral. His example is one of selfless service for others. His life and his death bear witness to the reality of what it means for people living with HIV to support each other. He is missed by his friends in the SWLF.

## DATES for Your DIARY

### World AIDS Day Vigil

7pm Sat. Nov. 30th.  
Southwark Cathedral,  
London, SE1

### World AIDS Day Mass

5pm Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> December  
Preacher:

### Rev. Timothy Radcliffe, OP

At: Our Lady of the Assumption  
and St. Gregory,  
Warwick Street, London

Charity Red Ribbon Cupcake  
Sale after World Aids Day Mass,  
by the Candlelight Supperclub

Delicious Homemade Red Rib-  
bon Cupcakes  
Vanilla - £1.50 each or 4 for £5  
Red Velvet - £2 each or 4 for £7

**Advance orders** can be made by  
emailing us at [candlelightsupperclub@gmail.com](mailto:candlelightsupperclub@gmail.com)

Profits will be evenly split be-  
tween CAPS and the Daughters  
of Charity, Mekele, Ethiopia.  
For further information please  
visit their blog at  
[www.candlelightsupperclub.wordpress.com](http://www.candlelightsupperclub.wordpress.com)

You can keep up to date with all  
of our events by checking our  
calendar on  
[www.positivecatholics.com](http://www.positivecatholics.com)

## **The poor you will always have with you?** *by John Thornhill*

This 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Second Vatican Council is a time to recall the fresh perspectives and teaching on how Catholicism should engage with the political, social, economic and cultural dimensions of the modern age. The Council called for a Church to be engaged with the reality and totality of human experience. The 1971 World Synod of Catholic Bishops summed up the call to transforming solidarity with the people of the world:

*"...the Church's vocation (is) to be present in the heart of the world by proclaiming the Good News to the poor, freedom to the oppressed, and joy to the afflicted. The hopes and forces which are moving the world in its very foundations are not foreign to the dynamism of the Gospel, which through the power of the Holy Spirit frees people from personal sin and from its consequences in social life."*

Pope John Paul II somewhat prophetically, restated our commitment to those at the margins:

*"(The Church's).....social message will gain credibility more immediately from the witness of actions than as a result of its internal logic and consistency. This awareness is also a source of her preferential option for the poor, which is never exclusive or discriminatory..... This option is not limited to material poverty, since....there are many other forms of poverty, especially in modern society—not only economic but cultural and spiritual poverty as well. The Church's love for the poor, which is essential for her and a part of her constant tradition, impels her to give attention to a world in which poverty is threatening to assume massive proportions in spite of technological and economic progress. In the countries of the West, different forms of poverty are being experienced by groups which live on the margins of society, by the elderly and the sick, by the victims of consumerism, and even more immediately by so many refugees and migrants." Centesimus Annus, 1991.*

Pope Francis has appealed to us again: *"How I would like a church that is poor and for the poor."*

So what has this got to do with the lived experiences of PLWH in the UK today? Poverty affecting PLWH in Great Britain is a clear and growing challenge. There are around 100,000 PLWH in the UK: this figure includes about one quarter who are undiagnosed, and unaware of their infection.

A 2010 report on Poverty and HIV by NAT (National AIDS Trust) and Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) shows that at least one in six people diagnosed with HIV in the UK have experienced "severe poverty" and that actual poverty amongst PLWH had increased in recent years. This research identifies six drivers for increasing levels of poverty for people living with HIV/AIDS in the UK:

- an immigration system which limits the ability of many migrants living with HIV/AIDS to generate and receive income;
- poor health arising out of poverty but also pushing people with living HIV/AIDS towards poverty;

## Continued from pg 12 The poor you will always have with you?

- high levels of unemployment (90 per cent of applications to THT's Hardship Fund were unemployed and causal factors were physical and mental health problems and immigration restrictions);
- poor quality housing with resultant negative health impacts;
- responsibility for children (one quarter of applicants to THT's Hardship Fund had caring responsibilities for a total of 6,800 children).

A 2011 report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) on the needs of people aged over 50 living with HIV shows:

- respondents reported twice as many other long-term health conditions as the general population; identified mobility problems and difficulties with everyday tasks;
- were less economically active, less likely to have a financial cushion for old age and were more reliant on welfare benefits. Many did not have enough money to manage on and had serious financial worries for their future.

And all of this, before recent welfare reforms take full effect.

In the New Testament, the word "poor" principally refers to people who are without resources, often reduced to begging, lacking wealth, influence, and dignity. But, "poor" also refers to those lacking in learning or those excluded from wider culture. In the New Testament poverty is a marker for wider exclusion and marginalisation. Today, PLWH in the UK experience wider marginalisation and deprivation. This includes stigmatisation, harassment and fear. This raises the question: how is the church called to exercise a "preferential option for the poor" where "the poor" encounter multiple disadvantages and exclusion, as with individuals and groups living with HIV and AIDS?

An appropriate response should be threefold: material, vocal and spiritual -

- In increasingly difficult economic times the community of faith will be called upon to recognise and respond to the material hardship that many PLWH experience as the State toughens its approach to immigration, disability and welfare.
- The church will be called upon to use its voice to speak up loudly for those forgotten or marginalised by the wealthy and the powerful, to advocate for them, and to challenge injustice. Finally, the church will be called upon to see, to recognise and to "name" the lived experience of PLWH in our midst; and by so doing offer, and receive, pastoral and spiritual comfort and support.

*"If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." (James 1:15-17)*



Healing at Douai

## Catholics for Aids Prevention & Support

We are a network of catholics in Britain and Ireland promoting HIV prevention and support.

We aim to be a voice in the church for people living with HIV/AIDS and a catholic voice in the world of HIV/AIDS.

## Prayer and blessing in a time of HIV and AIDS

By Vincent Manning

*As those who keep the night-watch look for dawn,  
so, Lord, we look for your help.  
May we live positively:  
may we find love to strengthen  
us and free us from fear:  
in the name of him who by  
dying and rising again  
conquered death and is with  
us now, Jesus Christ.  
Receive a blessing for all that  
may be required of you:  
That love may drive out fear,  
that you may be more  
perfectly abandoned to the  
will of God,*

*and that peace and contentment may reign in your hearts  
and through you spread over  
the face of the earth.*

*The Blessing of God,  
Giver of life,  
Bearer of pain,  
Maker of Love,  
Creator and Sustainer,  
Liberator and Redeemer,  
Healer and Sanctifier,  
be with you and all whom you  
love, both living and departed,  
Now and forever.*

From 'Like Leaves to the Sun: Prayers from the Iona Community' 2013

Catholics for Aids Prevention & Support

### Our Patrons

*Rt. Hon. Baroness Masham of  
Ilton*

*David and Rachel Christie-  
Davies and Family*

*Timothy Radcliffe, OP*

*The Most Reverend Peter  
Smith, Archbishop of  
Southwark*

*John Kearns CP, UK*

## Our Objectives are

to promote education and prevention, treatment, care and relevant pastoral ministry for all those living with and affected by HIV/AIDS, particularly but not exclusively in the UK and Ireland.

to promote the practical, financial, emotional, spiritual, sacramental and pastoral needs of people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS and to develop appropriate responses.

to promote continuing reflection on all aspects of ethical, theological, and other challenges raised by HIV/AIDS, not least issues of social justice, through publication, seminars, and other relevant means.



CAPS general e-mail/website: [info@caps-uk.org](mailto:info@caps-uk.org) - [www.caps-uk.org](http://www.caps-uk.org)

Positive Catholics e-mail/website:  
[info@positivecatholics.com](mailto:info@positivecatholics.com) - [www.positivecatholics.com](http://www.positivecatholics.com)

Charity Registration Number : 1095756