

CATHOLICS for
AIDS
PREVENTION and
SUPPORT



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NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2012

The Chairperson's Reflection - Can we 'End AIDS'?

We are now in the 3rd decade of HIV and AIDS as an international phenomenon. It is of course much more than just a medical condition, and that is why the International AIDS Conference held every two years is not at all like most medical conferences. In July this year, in Washington DC, AIDS 2012 was a huge affair with almost 24,000 delegates from 184 countries in attendance. Two delegates represented CAPS, and also attended the interfaith pre-conference entitled 'Taking Action for Health Dignity and Justice' at Howard University, and the Catholic AIDS Conference, at the Catholic University of America. You can read a version of the presentation we gave at each conference on the Positive Catholics (PC) model of ministry, and reflections from Adela in this Newsletter.

To loud cheers and applause the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton welcomed delegates with "...five words we have not been able to say for too long: 'Welcome to the United States'". Following President Obama's repeal of the 22 year long ban on entry to the USA for anyone living with HIV, that the Conference was held in the USA at all, was a sign of progress - a victory of reason over stigma and prejudice. Yet it also indicates why the tone of triumphal optimism stated in the AIDS 2012 title 'Turning the tide together' and the oft repeated slogan 'We Can End AIDS' was greeted with caution by many delegates. The medical advances in treatment, and especially treatment as effective prevention, is remarkable. At the end of 2011, 8 million people were receiving antiretroviral therapy, an increase of more than 1 million in 12 months. Such impressive progress gives hope that the goal of 15 million people accessing life-saving drugs by 2015 is a real possibility.

Delegates heard that an 'AIDS free generation' is scientifically achievable. However, a major global commitment will be required to make it happen. And because HIV and AIDS is more than medical, the optimism and feeling that it can be done must not prevent careful analysis of how it can be done. Alongside treatment and scientifically proven methods of prevention we also need to promote the human rights of, justice for, and equal dignity of those populations and groups such as sex workers and drug users, Gay men, and women, who are most vulnerable to infection. The temptation to view the eradication of AIDS as just a matter of medical intervention is understandable. But we will never achieve an HIV-free generation without combating the stigma, prejudices, social, political, and religious disadvantages that many suffer throughout the world and increase vulnerability to HIV - especially women.

Christians view the human person as more than just a site of biological functions, so we should be well placed to add our efforts and commitment to the promotion of dignity amongst women and other marginalised groups. Yet our tendency to understand HIV and AIDS as a medical issue alone is evidenced not least here in the UK, where 30 years on from the first diagnosis of AIDS, we seem to have forgotten all the lessons that we were just beginning to learn by the mid 1990s. How soon we have forgotten the millions who have died of AIDS, and the suffering of friends, family and lovers. Conveniently, we can now ignore the harsher confrontations with AIDS and sex and death, but the deeper issues that challenged us then remain today, albeit hidden from view, in the lives of the 100,000 people living with HIV in the UK. We have still to learn what AIDS means for the people of God.

Living with HIV remains challenging in social and political terms, but also crucially for us, in spiritual and religious terms. As HIV remains a condition affecting the poorest in this country, surely it should disturb us that as a Church, whilst we correctly cite our involvement with those women and children affected and infected with HIV in Africa, we too often ignore the same African women and children when they sit alongside us in our parishes. If anyone should doubt this, just notice whether or not World AIDS day is mentioned in your parish. I

suspect that in the vast majority of our communities, even this once a year opportunity to acknowledge that we are 'the body of Christ living with HIV and AIDS' goes by without remark. Similarly, are there leaflets in your parish that inform anyone living with HIV that the PC ministry exists as a source of possible support, and as a sign of welcome?

The increasing numbers of people joining the PC network and attending our retreats and group meetings, mean that we cannot underestimate the actual impact on dignity and well-being that HIV still has. Whether it is the situation of the Gay man, the African asylum seeker, or the English mother living with HIV, we know that HIV can be a crisis that also leads to growth. Medical interventions are just the beginning. There is hope and faith and love in HIV and AIDS, but for the person of faith living with HIV, this can only be made real within a community that knows they are there.

We remain grateful to you, our supporters and benefactors, who enable us to respond in the small ways that we can. Please keep us in your prayers.

Vincent Manning - CAPS Chairperson



Positive Catholics stall at Washington DC Interfaith Conference

Positive Catholics: From peer support to peer ministry

A presentation to the 2012 International AIDS Conference, Washington DC, USA.

Hear my prayer, O LORD! Listen to my cries for help! Don't ignore my tears. For I am your guest, a traveller passing through, as my ancestors were before me. (Psalm 39:12)

Introduction

At a 2004 London conference sponsored by 'Catholics for AIDS Prevention and Support' (CAPS) and the Diocese of Westminster, Christians living with HIV in the UK reported that their needs were not being met in secular support agencies, and so began Positive Catholics (PC). More worryingly, neither were their needs met in the church. One PC member, Lazarus, on his experience of secular support agencies, said: *"Religious matters were simply not part of the agenda, often any talk of faith was actively discouraged. I always felt there was a missing dimension. My spiritual needs were unmet."* Another PC member, Mary, on her experience of church said: *"HIV is not acknowledged in my church. When it is mentioned, on rare occasions, it is always in terms of sin and judgment. If they knew that I am HIV positive they will think that I am a bad wife. Maybe I am being punished. But then, I look at my child, and I think: what sin did he do?"*

There are few places in the UK where Christians living with HIV can be open both about their own HIV status **and** their Christian faith. We can speak of HIV in the secular support group, but talk of faith is often misunderstood, discouraged, or treated with hostility. And in most of our Churches HIV is ignored, or is still spoken of as the consequence of personal sin and a sign of God's judgment.

There are many understandable reasons why the secular agencies do not provide for the sharing of faith. In a short presentation we cannot fully explore that issue. The fact that clear signs of welcome and an understanding of the situation of people living with HIV are absent from the vast majority of our churches, should surely disturb us.

CAFOD, the official overseas development agency of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales, has a long and internationally respected record of excellent HIV prevention and care work. But their focus, rightly, is on the situation in Africa, Latin America and Asia. By contrast, the lack of provision and silence within our UK churches, means that people living with HIV remain unseen and unheard. It is important to notice this inconsistency, made all the more apparent when we realise that a large number of HIV+ Christians in the UK are themselves African refugees and asylum seekers fleeing torture, war and persecution. How have Catholics living with HIV in the UK attempted to meet their own, and other Christians' pastoral needs?

In the Gospels we hear of Jesus' encounter with two blind beggars, in Matthew (20:30-34) and with the blind man Bartimaeus, in Mark (10:46-52). Considering these similar stories as one for a moment, in both stories there is a large crowd around Jesus and the blind beggars shout out "Lord, have mercy on us". The crowd turn on them and tell them to shut up! But the beggars shout all the louder "Lord, have mercy on us". Jesus stops, and calls the blind beggars to him. They rush to his side. Jesus then asks "what do you want me to do for you?" and the reply comes quickly, "Lord we want to see". Having compassion, Jesus touches them - "Go, your faith has healed you" he says. Immediately, we are told, the blind are healed, and they follow Jesus.

In many ways, this parable summarises the journey of the PC peer ministry. People living with HIV are on the margins of our church – represented here by the crowd. They call out in their need for recognition, and are silenced by the crowd. "Go away" they are told "we do not want you disturbing us". Never-the-less, they persist in their desire to meet Jesus the Christ. And when they are asked by Jesus, "what do you want?", Christians living with HIV say, "we want to be healed." So that is how PC began.

Sacred Spaces of Healing

Let your ears hear my prayer, O Lord! Turn to the voice of my pleading! In my time of trouble I call on you, for you, O Lord, will hear me. (Psalm 85(86))

How does healing take shape in the Positive Catholics peer ministry? Through regular group meetings and weekend 'retreats' we try to form a community around the structural ingredients of prayer, personal sharing, and breaking bread together.

First, we recognise that stigma and prejudice persist. Stigma and fear produce a silence that isolates and excludes people. And this stigma is experienced both as an external reality and as an internalised wound. A wound that very often runs deep and long. Many people will know what it feels like to exist with secrets – what it is to feel compelled to hide your-self from view. The first step towards healing the wounds of stigma is simply to be seen, and to be heard. To be acknowledged and accepted.

In the PC peer community we create 'sacred spaces' within which a person may be seen and heard. We behold the person who, through their presence and their words, risks sharing their innermost self with us. This is a privileged meeting. Our first intention is to listen with great care. Healing begins when a person feels seen and

heard, and when they receive the loving acceptance of a community that understands them. Jesus said, "*come to me you who are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest*" (Matt. 11: 28). Perhaps for the first time, heavy burdens are named, and the rest which Jesus has offered us is made real in this community of HIV+ Christians who accept, and do not judge.

Secondly, we thank each other. For through beholding and listening, we too are healed. The encounter with another person is always a gift. Each person is Jesus who comes to us, often in painful disguise. It is the Christ who invites us to wait a while, as it were, by the foot of the cross. So we wait upon Him as we listen to our sisters and brothers. We try to avoid giving advice, there will be time enough for the sharing of strategies of help and hope. Our first act of love is simply to *behold* the person, to listen with a deep respect, and to acknowledge them as they are. Wounds are always painful. Whether these are the wounds of broken relationships, or the wounds of the losses of health, or of hopes and dreams, the wounds of betrayal or the loss of dignity, or of not belonging, or of the loss of faith, even the wounds of feeling abandoned by God Our first act of Love is to be able to behold those wounds in the lives of each other, to acknowledge the pain, and not be afraid. It is an act of faith.

Thirdly, and foundationally, we welcome each other as sisters and brothers in Christ. As St. Paul tells us "*You are all daughters and sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*" (Gal.3:26-28) Paul points us in the direction of a community of radical equality and profound dignity. So we form a discipleship of equals, and all are welcome. We are Catholics and Christians from other traditions. We are women and men, gay and straight, black and white, richer and poorer, all one in Christ.

How wonderful might it be if we really believed our Lord when he says to us "I call you my friends"? (John 15:14-15). We are dignified through our baptism, and we remind each other of that often. We are sons and daughters of a loving God, and friends of Jesus. Healing begins when this foundational dignity is made real, embodied within the community of faith in word and action. When each sister and brother is accepted for who they are and as they are, the wounds of rejection, prejudice and shame are challenged and healed by love.

Sacred Spaces that Strengthen and Empower

"..the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning." (John 15:26-27)

The healing that begins in community is never a completed task. As with any healing process, when the most damaging wounds have begun to heal, we hope to recover ourselves, and regain our strength. As Christians we believe that there is a strength available to us through our faith. Yet in our experience HIV unmasks damaging religious beliefs which hold us back from that fullness of life. False beliefs, or 'half-beliefs' that weaken us rather than strengthen us, that oppress rather than liberate. Sadly, within our faith communities some of these damaging beliefs are perpetuated by silence and by words. An obvious example is the hard-to-shake insistence that our God is a God who punishes us. In subtle and at times very obvious ways we are encouraged to believe that we are unacceptable in the eyes of God, that HIV infection is the sign of God's displeasure because we are gay, or that God has abandoned us because we lack faith or are insufficiently 'righteous'.

600 years ago the woman mystic, Julian of Norwich, observed: *"..some of us believe that God is almighty and has power to do everything, and that he is all wisdom and knows how to do everything, but that he is all love and is willing to do everything – there we stop. And it seems to me that this ignorance is what most hinders those who love God."*(Revelations of Divine Love, LT 73).

HIV unmask our ignorance, our false beliefs, and our lack of belief. When we are moved beyond isolation into a community of faith that will see us, hear us and speak with us, we are also invited, perhaps compelled, to ask anew, what is it that I believe? Who is the God that I believe in? Am I really a daughter, a son, of God? Am I really redeemed by Jesus, my friend and brother?

One of the opportunities available to us in PC is to take time to revisit the beliefs that we hold. Partial or untrue beliefs, often formed in our childhood years, will be exposed. Through dialogue, sharing and prayer, we reflect upon Scripture together in the light and the shadows of our experience of living with HIV. Together we make new sense of faith in the context of HIV and we make new sense of HIV in the light of faith. An HIV diagnosis presents us with a wonderful opportunity to go beyond childish things and deepen our faith as disciples: to 'grow up', in faith. To take up our cross, strengthened, and follow Jesus.

Finally, how do we experience the notion of empowerment? In PC around 65% of our members are asylum seekers or former asylum seekers or refugees. Around 30% of our members are gay men. The situation of asylum seekers in particular, is about as marginalised and disadvantaged as one can get, even without the added challenges of living with HIV. Being dependent on one organisation or another for basic needs; dependent on doctors and nurses for treatment; refused the dignity of legal employment; constantly fearful of deportation, and often subject to hostility; they are strangers in a foreign land. Gay men also, have experienced oppression – albeit of a different hue. They too often feel like strangers in a foreign land; strangers in their own families, communities and churches. Even within the HIV agencies we are called 'service users' – like customers – as though we freely choose to use this or that service, when actually choice does not come into it. Over a long period of time, these dynamics can result in a person feeling progressively more inadequate, unable, of little worth, and lacking any real sense of one's own 'agency'.

In PC we are committed to equality, and to cherishing the gifts of each person in the community. Why? Because we are all baptised and have received the same Holy Spirit. We learn and grow through our relationships with each other and our sharing of faith. European gay men learn from African heterosexuals. Straight men learn from women. Catholics learn from Baptists, and Pentecostals learn from Anglicans. Baptised outcasts each one of us, we are indeed 'a fellowship of the weak', and there is a certain liberation to be found in that.

According to the gifts and abilities of each member, and only when the Holy Spirit moves, we create opportunities for people living with HIV to move from being 'service users' or recipients of others' kindness, to that point where we feel called, in some way, to serve others. Strengthened and affirmed in community this fellowship of the weak is Church. And as Church we will serve each other. As adult disciples of Jesus our friend we bear witness to love. Let those who have ears hear, let those who have eyes see.

Adela – To cut a long story short.

It was my first time since I was diagnosed with HIV in 2002 to meet and share my faith, experiences, hopes and challenges, in a safe space with different positive people of Faith. The liturgy of strengthening and healing at our retreat brought me closer to God and for the first time I felt at peace with the Lord. The burden of living with HIV was taken away from my shoulders and since then I believe that God is carrying me through the journey of HIV illness and I am still the same child of God.

Faith is not commonly used as a pastoral or spiritual support for the emotional and physical wellbeing of people living with HIV. There are many groups of HIV positive women, families, gay men and children in Britain, but not positive people of faith. Faith in our group is the source of our strength, hope and love and support for one another. We are group led, we make our own decisions, we pray, share and eat together. These make Positive Catholics unique.

Vincent Manning & Adela Mugabo

Versions of this article were presented at the Interfaith pre-Conference on HIV – "Taking Action for Health Dignity and Justice" – July 20 – 21 Howard University, Washington DC, the Catholic pre-conference on AIDS 21 and 22 July 2012 Catholic University of America; and as a workshop at the XIX International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2012), on 25th July, 2012 in Washington D.C., USA.



*CAPS Banner at the **END AIDS** March during the 2012 International AIDS Conference*

Turning the Tide Together - *Reflections from the 2012 International AIDS Conference*

I was inspired by the drive of diverse groups of people living with and affected by HIV. Researchers, scientists, faith leaders and others showed their commitment to 'turn the tide together' against HIV/AIDS. There were strong messages from different communities affected and infected demanding treatment for all, that violations of human rights stop, that women be involved in decision making, young people be heard and funded, and faith groups play their part.

We had the opportunity to share our experiences from the UK with others from around the world. We learned a lot from other groups. This raised our profile beyond the UK borders. Those who attended our sessions showed their interest in our approach to supporting people of faith living with HIV. During the conference, it was clear that in the developing countries, faith based projects are doing a tremendous job and there is a broad commitment to support people living with HIV and to send out prevention messages to their communities. The Positive Catholics model that we shared did appear to be a unique approach. Activists from Norway expressed their desire to start a similar model of peer support, with our help. We have been in touch with them since. Workers from Kenya, saw the potential of our model of peer ministry for application amongst sex workers and gay and lesbian people, who are often especially marginalised within their own communities.

On a sad note, drug users and sex workers, were not allowed to enter the USA to attend the Conference. It is well known that they are amongst the most vulnerable groups. I wonder how we can achieve a population free of new infections without listening to these people?

On an affirmative note, there were many 'open' gay black African men attending the conference. Their messages were loud and clear. They are tired of being discriminated against by health professionals, government policies, families, churches, and society at large. In so many countries, their human rights are violated and this has to stop now.

On gender imbalance in decision making and policies, a woman from the UK said *"Unfortunately the end of the conference was quite underwhelming, with a closing panel of heads of WHO, UNAIDS who were once again white men, older, from the North of the world. If we want to be 'Turning the Tide'.... we need to have a process that never stops distributing power and opportunities for the most affected populations to be heard and to have agency. I want every single plenary panel to have women, young people, and people who live in the South of the world. We keep saying that we can only do this if we work in union. We now need action: starting from here starting, from now."* Here in the UK much more needs to be done also.

I found the 'Global village' area very interesting with kiosks of exhibits and organisations from all over the world. We gave a workshop in the 'Faith Zone', with free doughnuts and coffee to attract an audience. There were different zones for the Youth, men who have sex with men, women, gospel choirs and others, giving out messages, sharing information and entertaining people with different performances. The village was like a vast bustling international marketplace, and was open to the general public. I noticed a big presence of African Americans. I am not sure whether this was due to location, or perhaps reflected the disproportionate impact that HIV continues to have in this community in the USA.

I had mixed feelings about the 'Turning the Tide' slogan. All positive people are infected with the same virus, but they are affected differently. Achieving the goals of a generation free of HIV might prove impossible without much greater commitment, and approaches that are multi-dimensional and responsive to different cultures and communities. The medical advances alone are not sufficient to halt new infections. Many speakers, especially from developing countries, voiced their frustrations with institutions such as the Catholic Church, corrupt Governments, and on-going cultural practices such as marrying off young girls. Too many societies still refuse to acknowledge different sexualities, still persist with risk behaviours embedded in cultural norms, and continue to exclude and disadvantage women. All these challenges are likely to hinder the efforts, courage, initiatives and funds put into this work to stop new infections and make treatment available for all. However, if we work together and use the energy gained from the conference, if policy makers could listen, and medical scientists link their work with social approaches, the tide could be turned together and maybe, just maybe, the universal goals of a zero infection can be attained.

Adela Mugabo - CAPS Delegate

CAPS NEWS 2012 - The Year Past – Highlights in brief

Fundraising Ideas

CAPS celebrated Mass for World AIDS Day 2011 in London at The Church of Our Lady and St. Gregory. After Mass Debra and Sophie had arranged a cake sale and a 'guess the weight' competition - of a splendid red-ribboned giant cupcake. They even took pre-orders, (for normal size delicious cakes), through the parish. Over £400 was raised on that day to support our ministry. Could you have fun, raise awareness, honour the memory of those who have died, and show solidarity with those who live, with a similar event in your parish this year or next?



Caritas

CAPS remains a member of Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN), the social action arm of the Catholic Church in England and Wales. We have attended directors forum meetings through the year. In October 2012 members of CAPS and Positive Catholics, Manchester, joined with professional charities, local projects, clergy and parishioners, and Bishop Terence Brain to raise awareness of HIV, during the "Caritas Faith in People" day in the Diocese of Salford.

Parents representing CAPS and PC also attended this years CSAN Parliamentary Reception in the House of Commons. Sarah Teather MP, Minister of State for Children and Families hosted, and Archbishop Nichols addressed the reception. Members of CAPS and PC will also meet in December with Simon Hughes, MP. He has expressed an interest in the PC ministry which has many members from his Southwark constituency - with amongst the highest rates of HIV infection in the country.

The Mildmay

CAPS gave input at two sessions with the chaplaincy team at The Mildmay hospital in London, which specialises in the care of people living with HIV, especially those with a late diagnosis and complex needs.

Benedictine Hospitality

CAPS contributed this year to the Biennial meeting of English and Irish Monastic Guestmasters/mistresses at Douai. We gave input on providing a welcome for 'marginalised' people, and shared our experience of the PC Ministry. Feedback was generous and kind. One Sister recognised similarities between the PC model of peer ministry and the L'Arche community model. A Brother said that he found our input the most valuable session of the week. We were very grateful to be invited and thank the Benedictine's for their welcome, concern and interest.

New Patrons in Parliament and Church

This year Timothy Radcliffe OP, and Baroness Sue Masham agreed to become Patrons of CAPS following meetings with the chairperson and other members. Fr. Timothy is known throughout the world as a respected theologian. Baroness Masham is highly respected for her commitment to campaigning for the rights of people with disabilities. She is a member of the all party parliamentary group on HIV and AIDS. We thank them both sincerely for their generous support.

Raising awareness in Academia

In addition to our CAPS presence at the AIDS 2012 conferences (see separate report), a workshop was delivered for students preparing for ministry at Glasgow University; and a short paper was given at the recent conference 'Redeeming Power: Overcoming Abuse in church and Society'. The paper considered points of comparison between the church responses to HIV and AIDS in the 1980s and 90s and responses to the clerical sexual abuse cases (see edited version in this newsletter). Our chairperson attended the Catholic Theological Association conference in Durham, to promote the ministry of Positive Catholics. CAPS members also attended seminars on HIV, spirituality and pastoral care at Kings College, and with the UK Consortium on AIDS & Development.

South London HIV Partnership

CAPS and PC remain a part of this consortium of peer support providers in London. We have strengthened our collaboration with other voluntary sector agencies and local NHS commissioners. Members have attended events and spread the word of the PC ministry at many Health events through the year, including those run by The African Advocacy Foundation, The African Health Forum, and The Positive Parents and Children, charities. CAPS has entered into talks with the South West London Fellowship HIV support group which has over 250 registered members, and meets each week at St. Winifred's Catholic church in Wimbledon. We hope that we will be able to support this lively and well attended group into the future.

PC Family Days

Members of PC London arranged two summer days of fun and friendship for parents and children during the summer holidays. These important initiatives that PC members have taken for themselves, with the support of CAPS, provide social support and friendship between families who are often living in isolation and on very low incomes. This is an example of what we mean when we speak of 'empowering' people.

PC Retreats and Group Meetings - The Holy Spirit moving amongst us

This year, in addition to our main summer retreat at Douai, we also held our usual spring and autumn retreats at Downside and Douai Abbeys. In addition we held a retreat at Douai over the winter Epiphany weekend, which was very well attended. We are grateful to the Jesuit Community at Farm Street for allowing us to hold our Lent and Advent liturgies in their chapel again.

PC group meetings continue on a monthly basis in London and Manchester. One of the participants during our Summer Retreat has felt inspired to convene a first meeting of Christians living with HIV in the Colchester

region. She met with 10 people this autumn. Please keep this group in your prayers. Following their own discernment and wishes, CAPS will be ready to support and encourage this new expression of Christian community in Essex.

New Websites – Prayer Support - Outreach and Global interest

This year we launched two new websites. Please visit us at www.caps-uk.org and www.positivecatholics.com. We continue to receive requests from home and abroad through these websites. Help others by downloading PC leaflets and fliers for display in your parish from the Resources page at the CAPS website.

We also receive requests for prayers from people, and are grateful to our Prayer group who continue to faithfully support us all, and individual named members throughout the year. Without your prayers we cannot continue.

Welfare cuts hit members - CAPS registers as referring agency with The Food Chain

This year we have formally registered with and referred people to The Food Chain which exists to ensure people living with HIV in London can access the nutrition they need to get well, stay well and lead healthy, independent lives. The Food Chain delivers meals and groceries, offer cookery and nutrition classes and communal eating opportunities to people living with HIV in London and their dependents. As welfare reforms begin to take effect, we expect cases of hardship and deprivation amongst our members to increase significantly. Let us hope our predictions are wrong.

Pastoral support for individuals

In addition to the prayer support, we sometimes have members who need more individual accompaniment for a time. Our model of ministry encourages bonds of friendship between the members to develop. Much 'un-noticed' support, through listening and small acts of kindness happens in this way. Not infrequently however, we use our connections to refer people on, or 'signpost' to other specialist services which may help with issues around housing, immigration, benefits, counselling etc.... We also have a small number of clergy who we can rely on to offer appropriate and sensitive spiritual accompaniment. Sisters, Gill and Marcella in London, and Margaret in Manchester, still journey with our members. Fr. Peter in Manchester and Fr. John continue to be present with us and celebrate the Sacraments with us. Thank you.

We also link members with each other for particular support, especially in times of crisis. There are many resources amongst the members, and many gifts that can be shared. Without over-burdening any member of PC, we encourage this way of Discipleship, as service in friendship.

CAPS Trustees Strategy and Planning Weekend.



This year, for the first time, CAPS trustees gathered for a weekend of discernment and planning. The growth in the PC membership and ministry means that we wanted to consider how we could sustain current activities, and what challenges we are likely to face in the future. The trustees agreed that supporting the PC ministry remains our main priority. In addition we identified the need for a building that could accommodate an office for CAPS and more importantly serve as a 'base' or a kind of home – a community resource - for the PC ministry. We are currently actively seeking a suitable property. **Offers of help gratefully received.**

From a Catholic Mother to another Mother. September 2011.

Thoughts have been going through my mind for some time now as to how other mothers cope or feel when

they have been told that they have a gay child. When I was a young woman I would not have connected the word 'gay' to being homosexual. The word homosexual wouldn't have meant anything to me, I don't remember ever hearing it. Those matters were not talked about. Where I lived there were two young men who always had lead parts in feminine roles in plays or musicals. They were regarded with some amusement because in daily life, they seemed a bit different from their peers.

As a young woman, I was rather naive and shy. When I started my first job I wondered about the way one member of staff was treated, and the comments made behind his back. When I asked about him I was laughed at 'Don't you know? He's one of them.' This was said with a downward gesture of the hand and a simpering smile.

When they realised I didn't understand I became known as 'little Miss Innocent' and was subject to whispering and sly smiles sent my way. Eventually of course, I heard words like 'queer' ascribed to the male colleague who was gay. I felt sorry for him. He was a quiet and retiring person. We became friends and began to have our lunch together in the staff canteen. He told me he was gay but afraid to tell his parents. He knew his father would not countenance the idea that he had a gay son, would consider it a blot on his own masculinity, so he kept it a secret from them. I felt sorry for him but our friendship continued. I even visited with his parents so that they would think I was his girl friend. I encouraged him to tell them, and one weekend he decided to do so. I regret my advice now because when I arrived at work on the Monday, the office was very quiet, the atmosphere subdued. My friend was not at his desk. I sensed something was wrong. He had taken his own life on the Sunday night. I knew immediately what must have happened.

When I got married I had my own children, boys and girls. All precious, each with their own little ways and characteristics. I noticed one of my boys was a bit different in subtle ways. He was extra sensitive to the troubles of those around him. I didn't realise until he was a teenager that he was in fact gay. I ignored it, and kept the knowledge to myself. I was concerned about him and wondered what his life was going to be like. I knew that his father would be very disturbed if he knew, considering gays to be as they were caricatured on TV with feminine clothing, overdone in the make-up department and in the way they spoke and walked. He was a man who considered homosexuality a matter of choice, the 'condition' to be curable. I shrank from the day that he would realise the truth about one of his sons. I prayed for him of course and put my trust in God to help my son walk the path he had laid out for him. God created him as he was, gave him the virtues and his nature. I know he had his own thoughts, as he strived to understand his sexuality and where he could fit in, in the world. He turned to work with the poor and the homeless and often he would speak to people whom he thought looked depressed or in trouble of some kind.

He had been away from home for some years when he decided to tell his father that he was gay. His father had hopes of him becoming a priest and to say he was shocked when he was told, would be understating the situation. Our son decided to 'come out' to his father as the saying goes, with the help of his brothers and sisters and myself who were there to support him. He could not accept it and the whole situation became very traumatic, ending with tears when, as a family we sought to explain and understand.

Everyone was upset and my son was very hurt that his father could not accept him as he was. Couldn't he have treatment? It was all in his mind. Why not look for a nice girl and get married and have children?

With time, and after much thought and prayer his father came to accept him as his loving son. He understood more about homosexuality, and could not doubt the role his son had adopted in his life. Reaching out to those on the margins of society, including those affected with HIV, who were looked down upon by the 'respectable Christians' who considered them to be sinners. Do they not consider that we are all sinners and we have God's unconditional love and are expected to give that unconditional love to all? Consider St. Monica, a loving mother who prayed for her son, with unconditional love. He became one of the great saints of the church, St. Augustine. He was what would be termed a 'rogue' in today's language, as were many of the other saints, who through love became remarkable people.

So I say to all mothers love your sons and daughters who may be gay or lesbian, they are flesh of your flesh and precious in the sight of God. Put your trust in God and be sure that as they have the love and acceptance of their loved ones they will find their way through Jesus and the workings of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

"Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore Love is the fulfilling of the law."

*Readers may also find **Prayers for Bobby** a useful resource. Available as a book and on DVD, the story tells of a Christian mother's journey to come to terms with the life and death of her gay son. www.prayersforbobby.com*

RECOMMENDED READING & RESOURCES

Leclercq, V., 2010. *Blessed Are The Vulnerable: Reaching Out To Those With AIDS*. New London, CT: Twenty Third Publications.

"This is not just a book about AIDS; it is an entire theology. And it begins where theology should: in human situations of brokenness and hope. God takes risks to liberate and so must we. Leclercq eloquently links suffering, cross, God's in-breaking reign, responsibility for just practices, and the creative power of liturgies, both sacred and secular." **Lisa Sowle Cahill** - J. Donald Monan, S.J., Professor at Boston College.

"This refreshing presentation provides a splendid convergence of insights from a range of disciplines and perspectives. The theological, spiritual, and ethical integration of the work will enable Christian scholars and activists to reach a deeper understanding and make a more urgent commitment in face of the AIDS pandemic. I highly recommend it." **Enda McDonagh** is Ireland's greatest moral theologian and has written extensively on vulnerability.

"In this beautifully written book, Vincent Leclercq offers both an ethics of hospitality and a theology of vulnerability in a time of HIV/AIDS. As a physician and a theologian, he knows that compassionate words must be accompanied by meaningful actions, and so he proposes an array of liturgical practices that help us stand in solidarity with those most affected by the pandemic. A timely and deeply humane work." **James F. Keenan, S.J.**, - Founders Professor in Theology at Boston College.

Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance: This website has a wealth of resources – worship, reading-lists, articles <http://www.e-alliance.ch/en/s/hiv aids/>

Planning reflections/worship on HIV/AIDS themes? HIV/AIDS is not just for **World AIDS Day** ! Bring it in to mark **CAFOD** Fast Days, **Christian Aid** Week, **One World** Week, local **Justice & Peace** events. CAPS has copies available of **Positive Rites**, a rich resource of ready-made liturgies, prayer-services, readings and prayers (Paperback, 93 pages) - **£3.50** incl. postage - cheques to CAPS.

'We Were Here: Voices From the AIDS Years in San Francisco' 90 Minutes

'We Were Here' is a powerful reminder of the early days of HIV and AIDS as told by those who lived through the 80s in the Castro District of San Francisco. Although this is an American account, it has wider appeal. It usefully brings out just how powerful the sense of crisis and fear was in the first years of AIDS. For younger people who may not understand the history of AIDS, personal testimony gives an insight into the range of feelings that still accompany the experience of diagnosis today. An extremely well made documentary, it bears testimony to the important contribution made by Gay men, and others, and how their early pioneering efforts to combat AIDS laid the foundations for what would eventually become the global response:

wewereherefilm.com



CAPS AIDS Memorial Quilt Panel, Soho World AIDS Mass 2011

Catholic AIDS Memorial Book - Names of those who have died are remembered at Mass on the 1st Sunday of each month, 17.00, at the Church of Our Lady of the Assumption & St. Gregory, Warwick Street, Soho, London W1B 5NB. Names are also inscribed, for each month, in the Catholic AIDS Memorial Book by Fr. Bruno Healy, a priest of Westminster Diocese, who is living as a hermit in North Wales. **Please contact us if you would wish to have the names of loved ones entered into the Memorial Book.**

The AIDS Crisis and the Sex Abuse Scandal in the Church: *A comparison of responses.*

I have been reflecting upon the church response to AIDS and the crisis that it represents – a crisis which is not yet over. I have been considering where there are points of convergence with the church response to the clerical sex abuse scandal. I have also been thinking about whether there are insights to be gained, or ways in which we can learn from our responses to AIDS that could inform our responses to the sex abuse scandal. Time is very limited, so in this presentation I will share three distinct but linked points that I hope will prompt you to make other links. I do not claim that these are necessarily the only or most important issues. I am also forced to limit myself to brief hints, with reference to the first 15 or so years of the AIDS pandemic. Each point deserves a more extensive exploration and exposition, much is omitted.

First, I suggest that when AIDS or the sex abuse scandal interrupts and disturbs us we are inclined to denial. Denial allows us to distance ourselves from taking responsibility. Signs of denial at work often include silence, blaming, dismissing, minimising and rationalising. However, a Christian response requires that we recognise and own the situation as ours.

Next I will suggest that the poor formation and lack of proper support meant that priests were ill equipped to engage with the realities of AIDS. This reinforces the need in light of the sexual abuse scandal to attend to clerical culture and formation.

Lastly I emphasise how AIDS ministry reminds us of how crucial it is that we engage with those most directly affected by a crisis. If we fail to keep those who suffer most, at the centre of our efforts, responses are likely to be misguided and damaging. I also ask could HIV peer support ministry be a model for healing the wounds of sexual abuse?

AIDS – Early responses in the church

I want to remember just how slow most of us were to respond to AIDS. Then again, no response is also a response. Fear dominated in those early years, and the early impression that this was a 'Gay plague', or something that only people very unlike ourselves were afflicted by – allowed most of us to keep a kind of safe distance from the whole ugly thing. There was, and I would say still is, significant Denial in regard to the reality of HIV and AIDS. It is very human to want to protect ourselves from distressing and uncomfortable realities that threaten or disturb us. Some people, including prominent Church leaders, who broke the silence periodically, reinforced the sense of distance between 'us and them' by attributing blame. The 'victims' of AIDS had only themselves to blame.¹ We could make sense of AIDS and understand it, we could control it and protect ourselves from it, by seeing it as the consequence of immorality. Unnatural acts, sex outside of marriage, the liberal attitudes of the 1960s, hedonism and 'promiscuity', and drug misuse – in short sinful lives and behaviours resulted in AIDS. We could remain immune from the danger, if only we would follow the teaching of the Church. So some said. Those who sought to explain AIDS away in such simple terms wanted to do just that – to keep matters simple and distant.

However matters were not, are not, so simple for those most intimately touched by AIDS. Others in the community of faith, the church, usually unseen and hidden, were responding in various ways: Mothers were caring for their sons; fathers were reacting to the disclosure of Gay sexuality; lovers were nursing each other; husbands were attending clinics with their wives; conversations in families were taking place; secrets were being told and dishonest relationships of all kinds were being confronted.

There were also many families where nothing was discussed, and no truths revealed. There were sons who never returned home, sons who lived and died alone. There were lovers excluded from the funeral of their

¹ Cardinal O'Connor, Archbishop of New York and member of President Reagan's Commission on AIDS in the 1980s warned "Don't blame the Church if people get a disease because they violate Church teaching"; Rev. Jerry Falwell, leader of the influential 'Moral Majority' in the USA, blaming Homosexuality for HIV/AIDS, said on National Television, "...a god who hates sin has stopped (homosexuality) dead in its tracks by saying 'do it and die. Do it and die.'" And "AIDS is a lethal judgement of God on the sin of homosexuality (and) on America...He is again bringing judgement against this wicked practice through AIDS". Allen, *Sex, Disease and Sin*, pp121-125, 139-145

partner by parents who could not accept their son's love. Women and men who could not forgive a spouse's betrayal.

So, in many ways our first response was to ignore, dismiss or silence those living with HIV and AIDS. At the same time we should recognise that the church's first actual locus of response is the most intimate of places. The church's first response, our first response, happens between us, has happened between us, between people who are sexual beings in healing and hurting relationships. What has occurred amongst us must be understood as being 'of us'. We are complicit. If we take Paul's theology of the one body of Christ seriously it cannot be otherwise. If a brother or sister in Christ is living with HIV then I am too. If one member has been abused then I too share in that abuse. We must be willing to 'own' the suffering in the situation. AIDS can teach us that avoidance and denial delays our own learning and more importantly abuses those whom we attempt to ignore.

Sexual persons, sexual ministers, poorly formed and silenced

In his popular book 'AIDS: Sharing the Pain' Bill Kirkpatrick writes: "in order to help people, we need to be psychologically comfortable with our own suffering; our own fears of contagion and infection; our own sexuality (a great problem for many Christians) and our own mortality."² In the context of AIDS ministry some clergy and many more lay people began to address these issues more openly, partly because AIDS confronted us and challenged us so persistently, whether in our most intimate encounters with lovers, family, friends, or colleagues, or more broadly in society. As AIDS disturbed us we became increasingly aware of the need to address our own fears, and especially our understanding of our own and others' sexuality.

Catholic AIDS Link (CAL) was established by lay people in 1989 and throughout the 90s responded by providing training for clergy, laity, schools and in parishes. I want to share a snapshot from my experience when providing some of that training designed specifically for priests.

Central to the training was the team member who was infected with HIV who would share their own story with priests. Diagnosis, fear and stigma, relationships, sexuality, intimacy, and theological reflection were all part of the presentation. The participation of a person living with HIV was crucial. In the conversations that followed, it was this person's risk of vulnerability that set the tone for and modelled the openness that enabled a depth of sharing and honesty in the group.

Priests also took risks in sharing their own fears, questions, feelings and dilemmas in regard to their encounters with AIDS. For example, following an invite from the Bishop in one diocese, he had explicitly written to his priests encouraging them to attend our training day. About sixteen men showed up. A younger curate explained that he had come in secret. He had rearranged his day off with the parish priest who thought that he was visiting family. He feared that if his attendance was known about, this would raise suspicions about his sexual orientation. This 33 year old heterosexual man could not trust and did not feel trusted by his brother priest.

² Kirkpatrick, B., 1993. *AIDS: Sharing the Pain: Guide for Carers. New Edition*. London: DLT. P.4

On another occasion during a discussion of pastoral ministry with gay people, a very old Irish priest, in a faltering voice filled with emotion said "I have never told any other priests about this before....but once, some years ago now, I did celebrate Mass for Quest" (a Catholic Gay organisation). I remember clearly the courage that this 'admission' required of the priest. My sense was that this was as close as he had ever been to sharing his own sexual identity with his brothers in Christ. I felt sadness for him. I also felt privileged to be present for that sacred moment .

Evidently opportunities for open and honest sharing were rare in the lives of many clergy. Consequently our training days often felt more like a support or therapy group, than work based training. The priests own fears of personal disclosure, points to a culture of monitoring and suspicion that was part of their experience, and to the resulting isolation and loneliness that we also know is a contributing feature to the sex abuse scandal. The rich and frank discussions that we had during those training events also highlighted the necessity to create safe places where clergy could receive and offer support. Many priests seemed to have no access to a safe and healthy climate in which the sexual and emotional issues that AIDS inevitably raised for them, could be expressed in respectful and honest ways³. This limited many in their pastoral ministry. AIDS exposed the deficit in clergy formation in regard to their own development as sexual men. Taken together, the surveillance culture leading to silence, and the lack of adequate formation, itself constitutes a kind of abuse. AIDS reinforces the need for serious reform within clerical culture and priestly formation.

The turn to experience – being vulnerable with the vulnerable

The priests involved willingly engaged with another person's actual experience, and they allowed themselves to be challenged by it. They willingly entered into that place of vulnerability, where they might have some space to reflect on their own situation and experience. They listened first, and allowed the challenge of empathy some room to affect them. They took the opportunity to express their own feelings. Very often these were feelings of confusion and uncertainty. For some men, their encounters with and reflection upon the realities of AIDS were conversion experiences. These priests decided to counteract the tendency to denial that I spoke of at the start. So AIDS teaches us that we can be changed for the better; we can be open to the Spirit, through others, if we are willing to engage honestly.

The HIV and AIDS literature emphasises the importance of the involvement and leadership of people living with HIV. In all our efforts at care, education and prevention, they should be fully involved. This is important for three reasons: Firstly, people living with HIV have what Mary Jo Iozzio calls an "epistemological privilege"⁴. They know what they are talking about, and we can learn from them. They are a resource. Without their involvement, we are likely to understand less or actually do more harm. For example, I suggest that no-one who was actually engaged in AIDS ministry would ever have sanctioned the release in 1986 of the CDF document *On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*. Whatever our doctrinal belief, the insensitivity of this document at a time of immense suffering and alienation in the Gay community was staggering. Who exactly needed it? It should have been shelved on the grounds of compassion alone.

³ Keenan, M. 2012. *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church: Gender, Power, and Organizational Culture*. New York: OUP, p. 256

⁴ Mary Jo Iozzio, ed. *Calling for Justice throughout the World: Catholic Women Theologians on the HIV/AIDS Pandemic*, pp.7,8

Secondly, a 'preferential option' to include those most vulnerable is an act of solidarity. The conscious decision to include is a concrete way by which we show that these brothers and sisters matter to us. By contrast, exclusion of affected people, as at the 1989 Vatican Conference on AIDS, when a priest living with AIDS was actually thrown in jail, demonstrates the opposite: we do not care, and we do not wish to be disturbed by you. Thirdly, AIDS ministry shows that, in the words of Dr Charles Farthing "If you are HIV-positive and a Catholic, then I'd say that there was no better person to counsel you than someone who is HIV-positive and a Catholic."⁵ Or, to paraphrase Henri Nouwen, the wounded person can become a source of healing for others. Research shows that HIV peer support interventions work. As a matter of justice and as one way to demonstrate repentance, could those who have suffered abuse, be resourced by the wider church for kinds of peer support, which could enable the healing process?

Vincent Manning - Redeeming Power Conference, St. Marys University College, Twickenham, September 2012



UK Names Quilt Panels – Our Lady of the Assumption & St. Gregory Church, Soho, London July 2011

⁵Timothy Radcliffe, p118 in *Aids Meeting the Community Challenge*.