

CAPS

Catholics for AIDS Prevention & Support



Newsletter 1st December 2014





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.**

CAPS

About

PATRONS: Archbishop Peter Smith - Baroness
Sue Masham - Very Rev. John Kearns, CP - Most
Rev. Timothy Radcliffe, OP - The Christie-Davies
Family

TRUSTEES: Vincent Manning (Chair) - Rev.
Chris Howard - Rev. Dr Robert Kaggwa - Joyce
Lyamuya - Adela Mugabo - Lazarus Mungure -
Michael O'Halloran - Stephen Portlock - Very
Rev. John Sherrington, CP - John Thornhill

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CAPS

Objectives

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.

An exceptional year?

We come to the close of our 10th anniversary year, and it has been a very good year indeed. In this CAPS News you can read about our major Conference, Trustees Away Days, the launch of our 'Positive speakers' project, and a short report of other activities, including news from our Support Groups. I hope you will agree that we have achieved quite a lot. I want to thank all those volunteers who have contributed this year – your extraordinary generosity has enabled us to 'punch well above our weight' once again, and we have achieved some remarkable things together. For your time, your talents, and your willingness, thank you.

Before I continue, I also wish to apologise. More of this newsletter has been written by myself than is usual. This is partly because whilst I have been writing, others have been busy doing so many other things this year. I hope to correct this imbalance in content next year.

One ambitious project in 2014 was the production of a unique short film exploring the experiences of Christians living with HIV called 'Love Tenderly Act Justly: Stories of Christianity and HIV'. As well as interviews with Canon Gideon Byamugisha, Timothy Radcliffe, OP, and John Sherrington, CP, we hear from women and men reflecting upon how HIV has impacted them, and their faith. We premiered the film at our Conference. It will be shown more widely in parish groups, HIV support groups, and for the benefit of colleagues within the HIV sector, over coming years. We have a further ambition, to make most of this footage and other reflections that we have filmed, available through social media and the internet, so that the wisdom of experience informed by faith, can be shared widely and easily for the encouragement and benefit of others.

A common experience expressed in

the film is that of not feeling able to be open about HIV in church. This challenges us all to consider how we are, or are not, as church, welcoming communities. There is no church that I know of that does not intend to be welcoming and inclusive. That the majority of churches remain places where people feel contained and restrained by HIV stigma is not exceptional. The prejudices, ignorance, and lack of awareness; the actions or inactions; reflect wider society. This should provide us with a strong clue as to why HIV continues to matter for the whole church – because as church, and as followers of Jesus, we are continually called to give an exceptional example to the world. It is not sufficient to mirror wider society. As church we are called to be an exceptional witness to God's love for each and every person.

But HIV stigma is such a potent and stubborn foe to get around. It has shown itself to be a difficult obstacle to overcome. It is difficult to shift. The way it works is more often sneaky and deceptive than openly hostile. It uses seductive arguments and makes false promises. Yet it appeals somehow to a more or less strong tendency that runs deep in us and is reinforced between us. I struggle to find a word that we can use for that tendency and dynamic – that combination of fear, and lies, and false promises of reassurance, that interplays with us, so that we are all tempted to look away. Inclined to refute or deny a reality which disturbs us or challenges us. On an individual level the clues for each of us are there when we find that we are ready to judge, rationalise away, blame others, or justify ourselves. Why does it seem that we are still unable to hear the cries for inclusion that come from people living with HIV?

In the film, beyond appeals for inclusion, we are offered a gift. Courageous, generous and exceptional witness is given that from within the

experience of living with HIV, there is some very Good News that our Christian sisters and brother would share with us, if we would listen. There is a deeper mystery to be entered into here. Something more that we have yet to understand. Yet we seem resistant still.

Archbishop Blasé Cupich has recently echoed the appeal of Pope Francis to be open to the challenges of experience: "...to experience the life of everyday and real people...Reality is greater than ideas" (The Tablet.Nov.15th). Why? Because Christians believe that it is our willingness to enter into the vulnerability of our own lives and that of others, especially the poorest, that allows the Holy Spirit in. In that place of vulnerability we learn compassion. There we learn to love. There we learn to struggle for justice. There we discover hope. Entering vulnerable spaces we remain open to the exceptional encounter with Christ, who transforms us. Who shifts stubborn attitudes and softens hard hearts. Who inspires us.

Christ who encourages and sustains us, as we try and fail, and try again, to be exceptional witnesses to God's saving love for us. Always thanking God for what Christ has done.

There is nothing to fear. Be brave, God is with us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:28-31)

Encouragement in faith through the encounter with HIV

If you cannot celebrate a 10th Anniversary when can you? For us, this year has been a time for reflection and celebration. We celebrate because through Positive Catholics hundreds of people living with HIV (PLWH) have found Christian love and understanding and the strength to carry on. An HIV diagnosis is still a great shock for most people. To encounter HIV is to encounter our own mortality and vulnerability. It is also an encounter with stigma, and a challenge in our relationships and in our families. HIV raises questions about sex, disease and sin. About gender, human rights, poverty and social injustice. HIV calls into question our understanding of God, and will test our place in the Church. As Cate Jacobs has said "To be diagnosed HIV positive is to be diagnosed with the most socially unacceptable disease on the planet. Nothing evokes fear judgement prejudice, and therefore stigma, quite like it does".

HIV is an encounter with faith and doubt, hope and despair, love and loss. Secular HIV agencies and doctors give essential information, treatment and help, but it is only within Christian community that we can explore the many pressing issues of faith which arise. We cannot abandon this 'site of suffering' and resurrection, expecting the NHS to address these issues on behalf of the church.

Fortunately, in Positive Catholics we have the resources of our faith to help us. Reflection on Baptism reminds us of our dignity as children of a loving God, which prejudice and judgment would deny. The stigma of the Cross is more keenly appreciated, when we too have encountered isolation, attack, and blame. Insight into this mystery can be deepened as we move towards that reassurance that Jesus has endured all before us, with us, and for us.

The support of Christian sisters and

brothers helps the mother who is wondering how to discuss HIV in the family as her children grow up. The young gay man who is fearful of his parents' response to the news of his diagnosis, can find encouragement by listening to others who have been embraced rather than rejected. In a community of compassion and understanding there is experience to be shared, so that a person does not journey alone.

In Positive Catholics, when a person is fearful and feels that God is distant, the words from Isaiah 43:1: "be not afraid, I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine" are experienced profoundly. The Word of God is felt when we are listened to with care, anointed with oils of healing, embraced as we are. And when we break bread together, we are the Body of Christ. To paraphrase John Sherrington, CP, "the same body with wounds still visible, that Christ offered to Thomas," (John 20:24-29). In Christian community we are able to offer our wounds for each other, and through a shared vulnerability, we encounter healing and new life.

So this is a time to celebrate these encounters with Christ. A year to be thankful for God's love revealed to us in the lives of others. A year to celebrate the joys and hopes of Christian life together.

There have been other important encounters this year. In May CAPS Trustees invited volunteers, colleagues from secular HIV agencies, and supporters to join us for our days of reflection and planning at The Kairos Centre in Roehampton. It was important to thank our friends and benefactors, and so we had a party and baked a cake. We also reaffirmed our commitment to support Positive Catholics, and considered our way forward as a charity. One of the challenges we face is how to share

what we have learned more widely, with others who are not directly affected by HIV. In the world of secular HIV agencies this is called 'raising awareness' or 'HIV Education and Prevention'. We call it spreading the Gospel message. All Christians have this mission and duty, to reach out in love to others, to share the Good News, and that includes HIV positive Christians.

We decided that a conference would be one way to reach out to others, beyond the Positive Catholics community. Collaborating with parishioners at St. Martin's, and colleagues from the Terrence Higgins Trust, 'Love Tenderly Act Justly: Stories of HIV and Christianity Today' (LTAJ), took place at St. Martin in the Fields Church, Trafalgar Square, last month. With Christians from many denominations, PLWH, theologians, and colleagues in the HIV sector, we spent the day reflecting upon what God might be saying to us, through the encounter with HIV, in the light of faith.

LTAJ was an exercise in practical theological reflection, something never before attempted within secular HIV agencies, and rarely in churches in relation to HIV. In order to be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and following the Positive Catholics model, we began with prayer, and with listening, and we 'privileged experience' in the program. All the presentations, workshops and the CAPS film that we showed in the morning, were delivered by people who have lived with HIV in one way or another. With extraordinary generosity, openness and vulnerability our presenters spoke movingly about how HIV had challenged and deepened their faith. To hear what God is trying to say to us, we began by learning from the wisdom of Christians living with HIV.

Cate told of being spat at in the street

and abused, because of her HIV status. Of how she misses touch, and the “little intimacies of partnership”, since her partner Martin, died of Aids. However, she said that “living so close to death and loss also has the ability to crack you open to the very heart of life itself. In all that it appears to take from me, it gives back the most profound appreciation of even the tiniest moments of joy”. Cate described her experience during a Positive Catholics Retreat weekend at Douai Abbey, when she received the sacraments of reconciliation and healing. She calls this a “pivotal moment in my journey back into the church community, where I find acceptance as an HIV positive woman of faith”. Vernal Scott spoke of faith as a “reliable anchor in the sometimes turbulent sea of life”. In a public role as an AIDS activist in the 1980s, Vernal received attention in the Black Community Press. He told of his mother returning home one day, from Church, distressed and in tears. He thought that she had been in an accident. In fact, members of her church had asked if Vernal Scott was her son, and, embarrassed, she denied that he was. This experience made him feel unwanted by people in the church. He also spoke of how he has forgiven his mother. How he understood the power homophobia has to create fear and shame, and how this is often a feature of religions. Hannah Musa spoke of CAPS ‘Positive Speakers’ ministry in schools and parishes, which she leads. She asserted the need to educate our young people more adequately and honestly about relationships and sex, so that they are less exposed to the risks of HIV. She also spoke about how HIV positive mothers can have children who will be free from HIV today, thanks to modern medicine. Truly these are stories of kinds of death, and resurrection.

In the evaluations it was the many personal stories and honest sharing that stayed with participants, above all else. This should not surprise us. For those who work in this area professionally, or who are engaged already in HIV ministry, it has often been personal encounters that

motivated us. Yet sometimes we lose touch with this personal experience, we can become tired and forgetful. One delegate from a secular HIV agency said “I have worked in HIV for 17 years, but today I have been reminded of why I do this work”. For others, witnessing courage, and hearing the many struggles that people have been through, and how their faith has sustained them, was both inspiring and challenging. Many made a commitment to take the learning and challenges of the day away with them, back to their own churches, as a another step in the ongoing task of discerning what God asks of us in response to HIV in society and in the church.

So, we have had a very full year, celebrating 10 years of the Positive Catholics ministry. And in between all of this Kieran still opens the church hall on Mondays to welcome people living with HIV. Ma Betty still shops for the food we share. Adela, Sr. Margaret, Roy and Joyce still pray together. Manchester members visit Barry in hospital. John and Peter still preside at Mass for us. Michael arranges our weekends. The religious Sisters and Lewis in Zambia still pray faithfully for us. John tweets Good News on the internet. Rosie still rings others to ask how they are. Nelson still invites the stranger to our table. Len, Lazarus, Angelina, Hannah, Timothy, and Gideon speak up for us. And people newly diagnosed still contact us from around the world for words of encouragement and support. Words of faith. Signs of hope and love. More than cake, more than a Conference, these are the encounters which show what it means to be the body of Christ living with HIV. We will see what the Holy Spirit will do in the next few years.

Vincent Manning

Pastoral news

CAPS has continued to support the HIV Peer support Groups - Positive Catholics Manchester; Positive Catholics London; The Life Group Essex; and The South West Fellowship Group, London. We thank The Passionist Sisters in Manchester and St. Winefries Parish in Wimbledon for the spaces in which we meet.

In partnership with Positive Parenting and Children; The Metro Centre; St. Georges Hospital Trust we are also providing faith based and African peer support for people living in Wandsworth.

We held 3 Retreat weekends again this year at Douai Abbey near Reading, and Colwich Abbey in the midlands. For the first time this year the Manchester group organised and ran their own retreat weekend at Minsteracres in Northumberland. We are grateful for the support in kind, and hospitality offered by The Benedictine Communities and The Passionists.

Members have held 2 Picnics for families in the summer holidays.

Positive Catholics, London, has relocated to a new meeting place in St. Marys parish, Clapham. We are grateful to The Redemptorists for their hospitality. The move is likely to be temporary, as the hall in which we meet is up for sale.

New members continue to join Positive Catholics support groups. Inquiries have also come from several individuals around the world. We have offered some individual support where possible, and referred inquirers to support in their own countries.

Obituary

Alan, one of our main leaders in the south west London Fellowship group died in 2014. He was a much respected member of the SWLF group. Members visited him in hospital, and took care of his birds in his house. A Memorial was held in St. Georges Hospital Chaplaincy which members attended, in June.

CAPS news in brief



CAPS Volunteers helped Cafod International team with HIV training again this year.



CAPS members addressed the African community at THT Community Testing event during 'Ugandan Martyrs Day' celebrations at St. Chads Church, London in June.



CAPS Positive Speakers at Old Palace of John Whitgift School, Croydon.



CAPS Volunteers joined activists to protest visit of Ugandan President Museveni to London, following Ugandan laws to criminalise gay people



CAPS supported 'Prophetic Voices' Conference on LGBT Human Rights at home and abroad on the International Day against Homophobia in May.



CAPS attended CSAN Parliamentary Reception in November.



Robert Calderesi. © Sophie Stanes/Life Through a Lens Photography



Vernal Scott. © Sophie Stanes/Life Through a Lens Photography

Robert Calderesi

CAPS gains new patron

We are delighted to welcome Robert Calderesi as a new CAPS Patron. An economist and writer, Robert was the World Bank's Country Division Chief for Indonesia and the South Pacific (1987-89), head of the Bank's Regional Mission in Western Africa in the Ivory Coast (1991-94), the Bank's international spokesman on Africa (1997-2000) and Country Director for Central Africa (2000-2002). His book *The Trouble with Africa: Why Foreign Aid Isn't Working* was published in July 2006. The Economist magazine selected it as one of the best books of the year. His second book, *Earthly Mission: The Catholic Church and World Development* was published by Yale University Press in 2013. He has also written a memoir about his 30-year relationship with Jean-Daniel Rossi, who died of ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease) in 2008. He now lives in Montreal. Robert was kind enough to speak at our Love Tenderly Act Justly Conference. (See book review)

Brief Book Reviews & Recommendations

Robert Calderesi's latest book 'Earthly Mission: The Catholic Church and World Development' describes the sometimes paradoxical place of the Church in the world. The book is about the role, presence, expression and effect of the Church throughout the developing world. With reference to Church teaching throughout, Robert grounds the story in actual experience as he takes the reader on a tour of Africa, Asia and Latin America, highlighting both the positive and negative aspects of the Church's role. HIV and AIDS is addressed throughout, but gets particular attention in the chapter 'Tilting at Condoms'. This is an accessible balanced account, and an enjoyable read. It is an honest account, which is written with an apparent conviction, that the church has been and can be a force for good in the world.

Vernal Scott's book 'God's Other Children' tells the story of growing up in London as a gay Christian man from a Caribbean family in the 80s and 90s. This is a deeply personal memoir. Vernal captures the drama and the trauma of 'the AIDS years' extremely well when he was a publicly visible activist. He recounts how AIDS visited his own family and friends, and how with others, he tried to combat the terror of it. This is also the story of a struggle to stay faith full when God seemed so often distant, and the churches too often distancing. Ultimately it is a hopeful story, but not without going through some very real and painful experiences on the way. It includes many photographs of interest and has been updated to include the latest UK HIV statistics

A Prayer for others

The Samburu tribe from Northern Kenya

Courtesy of Sr. Gill CAPS Prayer supporter

We promise you my God
that we shall keep in our heart these
friends
and every night
our heart will go to sleep
near their heart.

And God said: "it is all right"



LTAJ. © Kip Loades

Catholic HIV Charity Conference at St. Martins in the Fields

A major success

Over 100 clergy, HIV sector professionals and individual Christians attended 'Love Tenderly Act Justly: Stories of HIV and Christianity Today' at St. Martins in the Fields, Trafalgar Square, London last Saturday (October 25th). Chairperson of Catholics for AIDS Prevention and Support (CAPS) Vincent Manning said "...the Conference was a unique event and a great success. We learned about how HIV impacts on faith, and reflected upon what the Christian churches response should be. The large number of people attending shows that HIV remains a significant issue in society and in the Church, and as people of faith we have an important contribution to make".

High points included a Film made especially for the Conference on HIV and Christianity which featured HIV

positive Christians telling their stories, and interviews with Canon Gideon Byamugisha and Very Rev Timothy Radcliffe, OP. Christians living with HIV shared their own experience throughout the day. Seven workshops were also offered by theologians and HIV professionals throughout the day. The Conference ended with a service of Worship incorporating many of the themes of the day, led by Bro. Johannes Maertens.

CAPS was the lead partner in this ecumenical Conference, with Changing Attitude, St. Martins in the Fields and the Terrence Higgins Trust (THT). "It was an extremely interesting conference and I hope that this is the first of many debates that will help shape the way the faith community supports those living with and affected by HIV" said Dr. Rosemary Gillespie, CEO of THT.

Speakers and Themes

There were a number of inspirational speakers. Referring to several

"...common sense..." pastoral responses to HIV and AIDS in Africa from Church workers and Bishops, Robert Calderisi, best selling author of 'The Trouble With Africa', and 'Earthly Mission: The Catholic Church and World Development' challenged us to question "...whether we are being as clear sighted, as resourceful and as imaginative in our own responses to HIV at home. Although the numbers of those infected are smaller here, the resources and opportunities for prevention and care are so much greater" he said, "Is there any excuse for the continued spread of this disease in a society as fortunate as ours? Why should people living with HIV and AIDS still have to live in the shadows, worrying about discrimination at work or in society? I can think of some Italian and French nuns I have met in Africa, bless their example, who would have a thing or two to say on the subject".

Hannah Musa recounted how after attending a CAPS 'Positive Catholics Retreat' she has been inspired to found the 'Positive Speakers' program, and



LTAJ Hannah, Cate Jacobs, Tina Beattie. © Kip Loades

give talks and education in Churches and Christian schools. Cate Jacobs spoke with remarkable vulnerability about the ups and downs of living with HIV for nearly 20 years. "To be diagnosed HIV positive is to be diagnosed with the most socially unacceptable disease on the planet" she said. "Nothing evokes fear judgement prejudice, and therefore stigma, quite like it does. Living with HIV has pushed me to the very limits of myself, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.....It has stripped me of the casual certainty with which most of us travel through life and flung me out to the sharp edge between life and death into the void of the unknown. Mine is a story of loss, love and survival. Of challenges and joys, a story of transformation, for nothing has honed and shaped me quite like HIV has..... You get to drink from the well of life and taste every drop." Sharing her own journey in faith Cate said, "I was and I am, a beloved child of God.....It is my truth, and the truth does set you free".

Anglican Priest Rev. Ijey Ajibade and Vernal Scott author of 'God's Other Children' also reflected on the theological significance of HIV and AIDS over the past 30 years. Very Rev, John Sherrington, CP spoke of Christ occupying the place of stigma on the Cross before us and how Christ remains present with us today. Professor Tina Beattie summed up many of the Conference themes. Amongst them, she reflected on how people living with HIV are already the church. She spoke of the suffering body of Christ being most profoundly identifiable amongst those on the margins of society. She was careful to caution against glorifying suffering, God does not want us to suffer. However, we must constantly "...migrate to the margins where we encounter Christ the word made flesh in the vulnerable, the marginalised and the wounded. That is where we learn to bring our interpretations, and our liturgies and our Scriptural meanings back into our spaces of worship, back into our churches, back into our old

wineskins."

You can listen to a version of Cate Jacobs moving talk at St. Brides, Liverpool, Church website at <http://www.stbridesliverpool.co.uk/page/1/#104026268273>

You can read Professor Tina Beattie's reflections following the Conference on her blog 'Marginal Musings' at <http://tina-beattie.blogspot.co.uk/2014/10/attentive-beholding-reflection-inspired.html>



CAPS Away Day 10 Year Celebration. © Kip Loades

Positive Catholics founding member resigns as CAPS Trustee

"I never had the faith to be a committed Atheist"

Stephen Portlock has been a trustee since CAPS was formed in 2003, and during the 1990s was involved with Catholic AIDS Link (CAL). He also began Positive Catholics in 2004. This year he has had to resign as a Trustee, due ill health. Now is a fitting time to thank Stephen for his ministry of hospitality and fellowship, and his service for others living with and affected by HIV and Aids.

His journey so far has lasted 65 years (and we trust for many more). Stephen's Christian journey began as an Anglican, and has taken a

few twists and turns. He describes his family upbringing as being nominally Anglican, and following his Confirmation, for a brief period as a teenager, he "...tried out Atheism" and threw himself into local politics. He was Chairman of his local 'Young Conservatives' at age 14, but quit the party in 1969, considering that the Tories were going "far too right wing" under the leadership of Edward Heath. He also quit trying to be an Atheist: "I never had the faith to be a committed Atheist" he says.

In any case, an attraction for Roman Catholicism had begun to form in him long before, during a visit to Notre Dame in Paris, when he was a boy. He remembers being struck by the inclusive and classless nature of the congregation, "...Chanel suits and bag ladies" all in the same place, which contrasted with his experience of attending church in the Southampton parish of his parents. Following University in Sunderland, Stephen moved to London in 1971, and took a

job as a teacher in Newham, a rather miserable experience which lasted for just one term. Stephen felt that the particular school had little or no ambition for the students. Instead, he decided to volunteer at the Blackfriars Settlement where amongst other things, he helped adults develop literacy skills. He soon found a career within Lambeth Social Services working for 20 years, training first to be a Social Worker, and later working as a Family Therapist.

As a young gay man, Stephen explored the various social places and political trends that 1970s London had to offer. These were the heady days of The Gay Liberation Front and The Catacombs Basement Club, all night dancing at Heaven and The Market Tavern in Vauxhall. However, it was not until 1976 that Stephen began to fully accept his sexuality. He met Alan, with whom he formed a strong emotional bond, and their partnership lasted for 14 years. "Meeting Alan's parents, and visiting them, and my mother coming

round for Sunday dinner with us. That is when I began to feel really at ease with myself.” Alan worked in retail and owned an upmarket riding and clothing shop in Marble Arch. However Alan was clearly not too straight laced, and had habits that Stephen did not share. Stephen recalls one Sunday dinner when Alan mischievously decided to include a little marijuana as an ingredient in the chicken stuffing. Stephen remembers the lively spring in his mother’s step, as she left them on that particular afternoon. Stephen and Alan shared a home from 1984 -1990. It was during this time that Alan learned of his HIV+ status.

At the same time, Stephen’s faith journey continued. Familiarity with the history of The Oxford Movement, and reading the works of John Henry Newman, helped him develop a deep appreciation of how Christianity has shaped British culture. He attended mass at Westminster Cathedral and became increasingly attracted to the Catholic Church. In 1985 he commenced The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. During Easter 1986, he was received into the Catholic Church by Cardinal Basil Hume. By that autumn he was serving at Mass regularly at the Cathedral, and he began to consider whether he might have a vocation to the priesthood. In 1987 he first contacted members of The Society of Jesus (The Jesuits) and so began another important relationship that continues still today.

Stephen moved out of his shared home with Alan in 1990, feeling called to Religious Community Life. Alan did not approve. Yet true friendship and deep love transcends disagreement. When he made his first vows as a Jesuit on September 19th 1992, Stephen was wearing the bespoke suit that Alan had made for him, for the occasion. Stephen was with Alan when he died from Aids, in the Mildmay Hospital just two months earlier, on the feast day of St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of The Jesuits.

Although Stephen had maintained a celibate lifestyle since 1985, he received

his own HIV diagnosis in 1995. His Jesuit Community accepted the news, and Stephen continued with his studies in philosophy and theology in preparation for ordination. No doubt there were challenges as not only Stephen but also the wider Jesuit family came to understand what an HIV diagnosis means, ‘in the family’. A few years later Stephen had the first of several heart attacks linked to the side effects of the HIV medication he was taking. He underwent heart bypass and other major follow up operations during 2002. Necessarily this interrupted his studies, and delayed his ordination as Deacon. Although Stephen was reluctant, he discontinued his preparations for ordination, and left Jesuit Community life in 2004 after nearly 15 years.

Relationships change. We journey together closely for a while in one way, and then circumstances change, and we develop new ways of belonging. Stephen has maintained a great closeness and affection for his Jesuit brothers and now lives in a property provided by the Society of Jesus. It is in this Jesuit house of hospitality that Stephen has hosted our Positive Catholics meetings, and CAPS Trustees meetings over many years. Similarly, Jesuits are frequent visitors, dropping by to share a gin and tonic, a meal, or to stay when visiting London.

So too, the circumstances mean that Stephen will no longer be a CAPS Trustee, and can no longer host our meetings. He may not feel able to join us for our summer Retreats at Douai. Yet he remains a valued member of the Positive Catholics community, and will continue to share and receive the gifts of Christian community, and we thank him for all that he has done, and for all that he is.

Vincent Manning



A pastoral reflection

To whom do we belong?

Due to funding shortfalls, the 'Open Heart House' HIV support centre in Dublin, closed its doors on 30 September 2014. Ronan, who had volunteered at Open Heart House and attended The Love Tenderly Act Justly Conference, tells here of his determination that people living with HIV in Ireland will not be left neglected by the Church.

"To whom do we belong? Do we belong to the world, its worries and its endless urgencies and emergencies or do we belong to God and God's people." Henri Nouwen saw this question as being at the core of the spiritual life. I believe this question also goes to the heart of responding as Christians to HIV/Aids. Stigma, isolation, fear.

Such realities fade in the transforming experience of 'belonging' to an all-loving God amid a community that actively makes that love manifest. My decision to travel from Dublin to attend the "Love Tenderly Act Justly" conference was made in the hope that I would encounter such communities, first-hand. I was not disappointed. The conference was a place of gathering for many inspirational people and groups committed to fostering a redeeming sense of belonging amongst those living with HIV/Aids.

Meeting together in the centre of the diverse metropolis of London, my first and most abiding impression was the immediate sense of community felt amongst those gathered. This was a Christian assembly composed of contrasting outlooks and traditions. Yet we shared a very clear and unifying purpose: a sincere desire to respond to the witnessed need of another. In a real sense, gathering like this in faith, to grow through sharing, and learning to 'love more tenderly' is a process that

surely goes to the heart of every true Christian community. This sense of unity and solidarity was evident in each of the sessions which were marked by a deep mutual respect, openness and trust. This allowed for much sensitive, often difficult, but ultimately hopeful journeys to be shared.

A highlight was the superbly produced film *Love Tenderly, Act Justly: Stories of HIV and Christianity*. Listening to confident, articulate and joyful speakers such as Hannah Musa, I witnessed the difference small groups of sincere and dedicated Christians (in organisations such as 'Positive Catholics') can make, in creating a sense of belonging for those experiencing estrangement and separation. The new life and sense of purpose expressed by such 'Positive Speakers' was a reminder that at the heart of the Christian message is the reality of God's eternal love revealed in Christ's life, death and resurrection. This is a truth that never loses its power or gets old. It is a message



© Kip Loades

uniquely capable of enabling us to lift up our heads and start anew with dignity, purpose and hope.

Fr Timothy Radcliffe's thought provoking reflections in the film, highlighted the creation of a sense of belonging as being at the heart of making the Christian message a reality. Pointing out the preferential love Jesus expressed for the sick and suffering, he emphasised how Jesus sought out, first-and-foremost, those who had been forced to the fringes, to bring them back to the heart of the community. Importantly, this process, so central to the Church's mission, is not simply a question of what the Church can offer. Rather, in reaching out to those who suffer, the Church as a community of faith is itself enriched and enlivened. As Fr Radcliffe reminds us, those who suffer, are most tangibly identifiable with Christ himself; "I was hungry and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave me drink, sick and you visited me" (Matt 25:35-6). Reaching out and sharing the challenges and difficulties of our neighbour, we meaningfully encounter Christ himself. An encounter that always leaves us richer and better than we were before. In such ministry, the Church becomes authentically and visibly the sign of Christ's love in the world. Through such encounter we are opened to the transformative love of Christ for us.

My experiences at the London conference have animated and enlivened my own desire to develop faith-based initiatives here in the Irish capital. The HIV pandemic has affected Dublin for thirty years and over that period the 'face' of HIV/Aids has changed. Improved medication means healthier, longer lives. But the profound alienation and stigma which HIV attracts is still very much present. Many Christians living with HIV here, have drifted away from 'institutional' faith. Often they recount alienating experiences, from apathy and disinterest, to a perceived lack of acceptance and intolerance. We are challenged to question whether they have drifted away, or have we pushed them out? I find this immensely

sad. Especially as simple gestures, born of a sincere desire to listen and acknowledge, can go a long way in repairing such experiences.

Many people living with HIV struggle each day to get by amid the "endless urgencies and emergencies" that come with illness and change. Sadly, 'The Faith' can thus become an optional extra. Something that does not directly concern them. An irrelevance. Perhaps this should not surprise us if 'The Faith', and the Church, are not experienced as supportive, empowering or life giving. Yet I believe in the proven power of the Christian message to instil new dignity and purpose. So this is a hurdle that we should actively seek to overcome, through creating an affirming space where HIV positive people of faith can encounter the love and beauty of the Church within a vibrant, active community.

In this regard we are currently organising a regular faith-based prayer event that will hopefully become a 'welcoming heart' in the city. Central to this is enabling people to gather in a relaxed and safe environment that is conducive to deepening each person's sense of community with each other and the Church; reclaiming a healthy conception of one's own place within the community of God's people. Sharing in one-another's beliefs, fears and hopes fosters a genuine sense of neighbourly care and communion, directly confronting the isolation and alienation associated with HIV. Integral to such meetings is the place of prayer which nourishes the Gospel message and makes present its joyful reality, concretely in people's lives. In experiencing God's love through a life-giving relationship with Him, one is bestowed with a supreme dignity and true sense of belonging which can never be stripped away or lost.

As the Passionist chaplain to 'Positive Catholics' Fr. John Sherrington, CP, observed, the Church was born amid the bleak but redemptive suffering of the Cross. In its ministry to those who are suffering, the Church is at its

most authentic and most restorative. As Professor Tina Beattie reminded us in her reflection on the Conference, suffering is that necessary and mysterious human reality we all must face. As people of faith we do not seek to run away from it. Rather, as a community we help bear one-another's burdens, bringing our suffering in faith to the transforming light of God's redeeming presence. In such faith-communities we witness the awesome power God alone possesses to bring new life and goodness from even the most painful human situations. As Pope John Paul II beautifully noted in reflecting upon the coming of the Kingdom of God; "suffering is present in the world in order to release love, in order to give birth to works of love towards neighbour, in order to transform the whole of human civilization into a civilization of love." (Salvifici Doloris, n.30)

Catholics for AIDS Prevention and Support (CAPS) and the pioneering ministry of those Christians engaged in 'Positive Catholics' have been an example and inspiration for me, as we prepare here in Dublin for a regular Catholic HIV-faith response. I thank Vincent sincerely for his time and support as this Irish initiative gets under way.

Ronan Connolly, OP Dublin

Positive Catholics

The habit of living

Thanks to effective antiretroviral treatment, HIV-associated dementia is now rare. When it does occur it will often be in patients diagnosed late or with more advanced HIV infection. Milder cognitive complaints are common and are termed HIV-associated neurocognitive disorder (HAND). Within the CAPS Support Groups we do have several members with HAND. Here a Positive Catholics member reflects on what insights we might

learn from the experience of those who live with dementia.

This Summer I changed careers, after 20 years of working in residential care with older people, most of whom were living with dementia. I've begun a new stage in my working life managing a retreat centre and starting a course in Spiritual Direction with a focus on the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius.

In November I noted I was diagnosed with HIV 19 years earlier. Now in my forties I start to notice some of the early aging process happening in me a little prematurely when compared with my HIV negative friends. My thoughts wonder at the possibility of one of the 200 forms of dementia including HIV related dementia.

Encountering people living with dementia I've always been struck by the sense of loss experienced by the person as the familiar starts to become alien. Relatives and friends often feel bewilderment and loss as their loved one slowly loses memories of shared events. Even losing a sense of who they themselves are; certainly as they are now. I often hear people say the "person is gone", "it would be better if they had died", "this was the last thing they would have wanted" These are all said out of love, fear, compassion, anger etc. But, this begs the question, what of the person remains when dementia has taken so much?

Dementia is a horrible disease, that can rob people of their dignity and their relationships. Relationships are essential for the human and spiritual life. We often wonder where the person we knew before dementia, has gone? Is the same person still in there somewhere?

Reflecting on this I am prompted to ask myself: Am I just my 'thinking self'? Am I just what I think? I'm learning that I am certainly more than my thinking. That I am a mental, physical and spiritual being, and to live a fully human existence these three aspects need to be integrated.

Niall Williams in his book 'History of the Rain' writes, "Nan is Mam's mam.... she has what Margaret Crowe calls the All-Simon, which is basically a refutation of the invention of time; all time is the same to Nan, she has that most remarkable of skills, the habit of living, and has it so perfected now that death has given up and gone away."

Unusually in our society Williams is saying something very positive about older people and dementia. It is very difficult for a person with dementia to learn a new skill and it is very easy for the rest of us to focus on the skills the person is losing. Yet Williams is saying this person has a most remarkable skill, 'the habit of living'. When have we ever heard of a person with dementia described like this? Part of what he is saying reflects the ability of the person with dementia to live wholly in the present moment (even when it seems the person is referring to past events). Their memories have been lost and their immediate needs become paramount.

Maybe this capacity to live in the present moment is something already known to all of us. Maybe it is just simply forgotten, as our thinking takes priority and becomes the dominant mode of our humanity.

Eckhart Tolle in 'The Power of Now' explores this tendency we have to over-identify with our thinking. Thinking becomes a kind of compulsion, triggering emotions, determining our actions. Thinking, based in past experience or future concern. Remarkably, we do not even notice this happening. As thinking dominates our 'true' selves, we come to believe that we are our thoughts, and we forget how to live in the present moment.

But I am not just my mind, much less, just my thinking. I am more. Yet my thinking so often convinces me to hang on to a diminished, false self, assuming an identity that is not actually me. Tolle writes "Death is a stripping away of all that is not you. The secret of life is to "die before you die" --- and find that there is no death."

We have the ability to try to be fully alive now, we don't have to wait for dementia to strike to practise the habit of living in the sacrament of the present moment.

As we begin the season of Advent at the same time as World Aids day on December 1st, I am reminded of a reflection from Richard Rohr. He writes "'Come Lord Jesus," the Advent mantra, means that all of Christian history has to live out a kind of deliberate emptiness, a kind of chosen non-fulfillment. Perfect fullness is always to come, and we do not need to demand it now. This keeps the field of life wide open and especially open to grace and to a future created by God rather than ourselves. This is exactly what it means to be "awake," as the Gospel urges us! We can also use other words for Advent: aware, alive, attentive, alert, awake, are all appropriate! Advent is, above else, a call to full consciousness and a forewarning about the high price of consciousness."

By a member of Positive Catholics.



CAFOD Training. © Kip Loades

Cafod HIV team disbanded

People living with HIV need Cafod to stay the course

As part of Cafod's restructuring, the decision to disband the London based HIV Strategy Team, could turn out to be a grave mistake. UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé has warned that if the world does not rapidly scale up our responses in the next five years, the epidemic is likely to spring back with a higher rate of new HIV infections than today: "We have bent the trajectory of the epidemic. Now we have five years to break it for good or risk the epidemic rebounding out of control." (UNAIDS, 2014. Fast Track: Ending the AIDS Epidemic by 2030).

The Special Place of CAFOD in Responses to HIV and Aids

Historically the Cafod HIV team has provided necessary support to partners around the world, to undertake the challenging tasks of Education, HIV Prevention, and the care and support of those living with HIV. Cafod has been the lead Catholic agency within CARITAS International on responses to HIV /Aids. Cafod led the way since the late 80s and 90s, something recognised not only within the CARITAS Catholic family but also more widely within the Ecumenical and Secular HIV International Networks. The responses 'on the ground' of the Catholic Church have contributed to the extraordinary progress made over the past 15 years globally. Cafod has also been instrumental in formulating theologically reflective responses. To take just one practical example, the Cafod 'HIV Problem Tree' devised by former staff member Dr. Ann Smith over 10 years ago, is still a widely used model to help HIV workers, students and clergy understand that the pandemic is more than a simple medical problem. HIV is an issue

of Justice, which challenges us to address the structural inequalities which make particular populations, including the poorest, women, and children, especially vulnerable to HIV. Important theological contributions from Theologians Enda McDonagh, Kevin Kelly, Tina Beattie and Julie Clague, to name a few, have all been undertaken with Cafod, helping the wider Church to reflect upon what God is saying to us, and what God is asking of us, as we confront the realities of HIV and Aids. Cafod has occupied a very special, internationally respected place in the Global responses, and that is something of which Cafod and the Catholic Church in England and Wales should be proud.

A dangerous trend

Cafod is not alone. Christian AID in London, have also disbanded their dedicated HIV staff team, as have Tear Fund and World Vision UK. The International HIV/AIDS Alliance sees this as part of a wider trend whereby

International Agencies and Funders are seeking to 'de-exceptionalise' HIV and Aids. The Alliance warns that "Inventing the end of AIDS when we are so far from reaching our goal is a grave and dangerous error... maintaining vigilance is the only strategy that has ever worked in the fight against Aids. Anything else will signal certain defeat in the long term" (International HIV/AIDS Alliance, 2014. AIDS Today: Tell no lies and claim no easy victories).

The progress that has been made, has been hard won. There is so much more to be done, and we must not forget that responding to HIV effectively, involves a complex range of sustained responses, because the causes of HIV and Aids are complex; at the individual, familial, societal, and international levels. HIV and Aids remains exceptional because of the stigma and prejudice that still persists with HIV; the ways that HIV intersects with issues of Human Rights and Gender Inequality; and the fact that 35 million people are still living with HIV and Aids globally, and millions will die for lack of treatment.

As other Agencies downscale their capacity to respond to the challenges of HIV, a distinctive Catholic presence is likely to become more, not less, important. As others move on, it is our Christian obligation to remain with all those people living with or affected by HIV, especially the weakest, the most marginalised and still stigmatised, of our sisters and brothers. Not only as a work of mercy and justice, but also because by doing so we remain open to what the Holy Spirit wishes all of us to understand, through the encounter with HIV today. "Oh that today you would hear his voice, harden not your hearts..." (Heb. 3:7-8).

Stigma and prejudice still exists within the churches. It is also important that Cafod remain engaged theologically, as a counter witness to those who still preach HIV and Aids as God's retribution, who promote 'miracle cures' over engagement with doctors, or lend their voices of judgment and

condemnation to marginalised groups such as sex workers and gay men.

A Catholic presence at a site of suffering

The Cafod HIV Team has provided absolutely crucial back-up, and structural support, for the teams and individuals working in challenging situations around the world. They have enabled the broader International and Ecumenical links to be maintained. On behalf of the whole Catholic Church, Cafod has been a visible and distinctive Catholic presence. At a time when our Church is so often criticised, this unique Catholic contribution stands as a Gospel witness of solidarity, with global significance. The team have enabled theological resources, space and time to be afforded, so that our response as Catholic Christians is rooted in Gospel values. To withdraw such structural support, at this crucial time, threatens to undermine the work on the ground. Organisationally, Cafod risks losing sight of why HIV and Aids should remain prioritised as part of a Global strategy - an insight which Cafod staff and theologians recognised before many others did, 'prophetically', more than 25 years ago.

To paraphrase Fr. John Sherrington, CP, "HIV and Aids is a sign to us that the Passion of Jesus continues in our world - a site of crucifixion. HIV remains a site of struggle and abandonment. A site of alienation, and rejection. Yet Christ is present in sites of suffering, and challenges us to make a response".

The whole Cafod team, will have to plan very carefully if we are not to risk losing the expertise and resources developed over the past 25 years, which enables a Catholic presence to be maintained in this exceptional site of suffering.

Vincent Manning
Cafod HIV Advisory Group Member



Pope sends assurance of prayers to CAPS Chairperson

Last year, CAPS Trustees wrote to Pope Francis because World AIDS Day coincided with a Sunday, and to mark the start of our 10th Anniversary year. We were delighted to receive a reply on behalf of Pope Francis from Archbishop Angelo Becciu, who wrote "I am pleased to assure you of a remembrance in His Holiness's prayers". Archbishop Becciu is the head of of General Affairs at The Secretariat of State at the Vatican, which performs all the political and diplomatic functions of the Vatican and the Holy See. He meets the Pope regularly (perhaps daily) to arrange his diary, and raise important matters with The Pope. So, we feel sure that the Archbishop has shared our letter with Pope Francis, and are encouraged by the reply and the prayers of Pope Francis.



Positive Catholics Gay Pride. © Kip Loades

Be true to yourself

Life is a gift

In this article a newly diagnosed member of Positive Catholics retells the day that he spent with friends at this year's Pride march in London, and why he wanted to be there.

My Journey to this years LGBTQ Pride Parade actually started on the 26th February this year when I was diagnosed HIV positive (I was infected by low risk exposure on September 8th 2013).

The first few days were hell, but from the moment of being diagnosed I sought to gain as much knowledge about HIV and the effect on my body to calm the pain and sorrow I knew would come. I believe it worked, from day 58 my little black cloud of waking up each morning with the sadness of being HIV finally broke and I awoke

this day with thoughts of - what am I doing today? - since then it's been a quest to meet as many people with HIV as possible, build a new life and a new community of friends.

I think I've been lucky and I think I've been blessed. I don't think I could have made it this far without the comfort of God's love on my side.

Attending the LGBTQ Pride Parade was about fun for me, it was also about reaching out to everyone positive and negative, just to say life goes on and people like me who live with HIV, and take the treatment are no risk to anyone. I am a healthy person in the community at large, living in hope of being loved and accepted and living in the Spirit of God's love.

On Pride day me and my three (negative) friends, Julian, Richard and Clive met up with all the other Christians in the march and instantly got soaked. To combat the weather we put little purple rain macs underneath our Positive Catholic t-shirts (to the

amusement of some, as it looked like we were wearing tutu's ... but we didn't care - much!). The four of us walked hand in hand the whole length of the march and the great die-hard soaking wet crowd were warmly receptive and encouraging.

It was a good day and the start of something important for me and if just one person was encouraged and comforted - to know life is worth being true to yourself, and is a gift, then I'm happy!

God bless us all,

Lenny.

The “New Normal”

This is an extract from someone newly diagnosed living in a remote situation, who has received support by email from one of our volunteers.

I went home two days ago and over lunch with mom I could not get the food down as I just wanted to blurt out my status but she was so happy to have me home. Then she started talking about cousins who were sick and needed prayers. It was so difficult so I went out later to do the usual things I do when I am home..... surprisingly when I returned I felt much better. It seemed like my day could still be “normal” even if I have this cloud hovering over me.

Today I felt a bit dizzy, maybe due to vertigo, but still managed to meet up with friends, hinting to one that I may be sick and asking about wills and burial insurance. I just want to make sure everything's in order now; then met up with another friend, he knows about my struggles with my health the past months and I hinted again that we can all go anytime. It was tough as these are good friends but I am afraid that they are not that exposed to information and I could be stigmatized.

I am also afraid for my family in case my status is known as I would not want them to feel any stigma as well.

In some ways though it is good to be home at least, to be in the company of people who care for me, and take my mind off my status, yet it also saddens me as I know that things are not the same anymore. A part of me still hopes there is a misdiagnosis or that I could turn back the clock last Feb when I think I was exposed. I remember a condom getting torn after an amazing sex that turns out to be my undoing. I know that I can't dwell on the past anymore but just have to find a way to live with this “new normal” but I think another thing that saddens me is that

this has taken away two things I value, my mobility and my health.

I guess I did not think much about the consequences. I wanted to live life without regrets and now I am full of it. I am not sure what would have happened if I just kept celibate as I did for the first 30 years of my life..... I know that I should try to be gentle to myself as you advised and I have been trying to do so, have not been angry yet since I learned of my status and have been trying to keep positive in my dealings with people.

A part of me is also sad as I would not want my parents to bury me, I would rather bury them and hope that I could last 20 years or at least until they move on, although of course I know that I should not think this way as you and another friend have shown that you can live and thrive with this. I guess right now I am still in denial and also am still struggling with how this will impact my life as I see it and my hopes/ desires especially meeting a partner again.

I will have my CD4 and other tests on Tue and then hope to see my spiritual director later in the day. Thanks for listening.

Be gentle....

Thank you for sharing this with me. Sorry I cannot be with you to listen more. You write so clearly, and movingly.

Your day sounds like one of those up and down days that we have. Especially early on, when we must hold so many secrets close to ourselves, even though a great part of us wants to tell all. Your ‘strategy’ of going about your business, and doing things to take care of yourself is certainly wise. You are right, you remain ‘normal’ – and things will eventually become more normal as you process all the feelings that arise over time. Things do get better and calmer.

Our Newsletters on CAPS site include some personal sharing that you may

find encouraging.

There is no doubt that increased vulnerability comes with HIV. We can feel very lost especially in the first months. Not sure who to turn to, who we can trust. Concerned for self, and the worry that we may cause others. Somewhat frightened. Take your time, and be gentle. Seek out others who have also lived with HIV. You will learn a great deal from them if you can muster the courage to meet them. There are many good people living with HIV who will be willing to support you – to travel with you. I hope that God will send someone close by, your way.

Take time too over the decisions around disclosure. Maybe begin to think about who amongst your family or friends you can tell. Planning for this sharing is also wise. Consider starting with a few close friends. If you choose wisely, they will be a great support for you if you decide to tell family members. I have to say, it is never easy, because in naming things we also speak them, and they become more real for us as we do so. But, there is a healing possible too: Healing of fears, and healing through love, understanding and acceptance of others.

Sometimes it is easier to begin to practice disclosure with someone that is not already a friend or family member. That is why meeting others in the same situation can be so helpful.

I hope that you will have a fruitful, and honest conversation with your spiritual director. Let me know how it goes, and also how your visit to the doctor goes on tuesday.

The future is unknown, but more full of good things and new horizons than you will realise just now. Trust. Be gentle. Thank God for everything.

I feel for you. We prayed for you particularly at our last Positive Catholics group meeting. Our prayer supporters are also praying for you.

Joy of the Gospel

Joy of the Gospel is also for people affected by AIDS in the UK.

In his recent encyclical letter 'The Joy of the Gospel' (Evangelii Gaudium - EG), Pope Francis leaves us in no doubt as to our obligation to include and reach out to everyone: "The joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded." (EG.23). Francis continues, "...above all the poor and the sick, those who are usually despised and overlooked" should be prioritised for our care and concern (EG 48).

100,000 people living with HIV and Aids (PLWH) in the UK today are surely included in this category. HIV affects the poorest people in our society disproportionately, many live on welfare benefits, are refugees, in debt and in housing need. Despite medical advances many still suffer with debilitating sickness and die at a younger age than in the general population. They are often isolated and alone, despised by others because stigma and prejudice persist, and sadly, they are generally overlooked in our churches.

The stigma that surrounds HIV in our churches, means that Christian PLWH are excluded from the Gospel invitation "...to respond to the God of love who saves us" (EG 39). For many, infected and affected, stigma, judgement, silence, or simple ignorance in our communities effectively cancels out this invitation of which Pope Francis writes: "Under no circumstances can this invitation be obscured!" (EG.39).

Catholics for AIDS Prevention and Support (CAPS) exists to ensure that the Gospel invitation is extended to all people affected by HIV in our country. Through our national HIV peer support ministry and peer support groups in London, Essex and

Manchester, we enable PLWH who are Christians to embody Christ for each other.

Living with HIV remains challenging, and people are always deeply shocked by the trauma of an HIV diagnosis. HIV is also distressing for the person's parents, siblings, children and friends, when they are told. The help and understanding offered during this time by people who understand the fears, anxieties and problems that come up, because they themselves have lived with HIV, can be especially healing. Through our networks we offer pastoral support, listening, understanding, acceptance, material help, and most importantly, spaces for prayer and Christian fellowship. Opportunities in community where "...faith itself in the crucified and risen Jesus is renewed, where the most profound questions and daily concerns are shared, where deeper discernment about our experiences and life itself is undertaken in the light of the Gospel..." (EG 77).

HIV also presents challenges to faith. Yet, research and experience show that HIV often leads to a deepening of faith and a strengthening of belief in God, who invites us constantly towards love. When empowered, Christian PLWH can embody the personal encounter with Christ, for each other: to calm fears; offer hope; enact the love of God; and open the way to healing.

CAPS members are also involved in events to promote awareness. Stigma remains the single most powerful obstacle to adequate care and support, and contributes to the rise in new HIV infections. Stigma and ignorance are best overcome when people confront the realities of HIV in their parishes, schools, colleges, and workplaces. CAPS members help our wider Christian family to do this, through workshops, talks and liturgy. We also partner with secular agencies, to assist them in their understanding of Christian faith. We intend, in this way, to be a Christian presence in the secular world of HIV.

CAPS is a totally volunteer run charity. Remarkably, we provide the only national Christian pastoral response for those diagnosed with HIV. The Catholic Church is respected as a key player in the response to HIV and AIDS internationally. So too, in this country, CAPS members hope that anyone living amongst us, infected or affected by HIV, will see that the Christian church here, also wishes to include them and cares about them. That they will understand that in the church of Christ Jesus, all are welcome. For as Pope Francis reminds us "...there is one sign which we should never lack: the option for those who are least, those whom society discards" (EG.195).

Vincent Manning - Chairperson



Cate Jacobs

Coming in from the wilderness (to the St Brides Community).

I came barefoot from the desert
with rough grains of yesterday
chaffing blisters between my toes.
I came with dust in my eyes

and the winds of sorrow in my
hair. You washed my feet
in goats milk, bound them
in a poultice of peppermint

leaves, dropped your tears
into my eyes, brushed my hair
with twigs of rosemary, fed me
dates and unleaven bread

wrapped me in a whisper
of God's breath
and sang my songline back to me
as you looked at me with my Father's eyes.

