

Catholics for  
AIDS Prevention  
& Support

*2017 Newsletter  
World AIDS Day  
December 1<sup>st</sup>*



CAPS

CAPS

## About

### PATRONS:

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

### TRUSTEES:

Vincent Manning (Chair), Rev. Chris Howard, Joyce Lyamuya, Adela Mugabo, Lazarus Mungure, Michael O'Halloran, Very Rev. John Sherrington, CP, John Thornhill

CAPS general e-mail/website:

[www.caps-uk.org](http://www.caps-uk.org) | [info@caps-uk.org](mailto:info@caps-uk.org)

Positive Catholics e-mail/website:

[www.positivecatholics.com](http://www.positivecatholics.com) | [info@positivecatholics.com](mailto:info@positivecatholics.com)

Editor and unattributed articles: Vincent Manning

Production: Nadine Cameron

Photography: All photos by Anthony Kelly unless otherwise specified.

Front Cover Image: Horcelie Sinda Wa Mbongo (winner Miss Congo UK 2017), artist, activist, and Positive Faith contributor. Photo by Kip Loades.

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# CAPS

## Catholics for AIDS Prevention & Support

CAPS

## Objectives

We are a network of Christians 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.

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.

Vincent Manning  
Chairpersons’  
message

Discipleship and  
courage in action

We have another packed CAPS News for you to enjoy reading over the coming weeks and months. In this edition you will be able to hear some of the more painful experiences that people living with HIV have. This is deliberate, because we wanted to contrast these difficult times in life with the hope and encouragement that we trust you will discover in our new innovative website film resource *Positive Faith*. I do want to thank all our volunteers who have supported CAPS ministry over the past year. It is truly remarkable what goodness there is in the world, and how many Christians go about quietly serving and

loving others, without asking for reward or acknowledgment. It is Discipleship in action, and without our volunteers, many of whom are living with HIV themselves, we can do nothing. In particular I want to thank Adela who founded and has led our Positive Catholics Manchester group for several years. Next year the responsibility will be handed on to other members of the group, although Adela will continue as a CAPS Trustee.

And I want to thank all those involved in the *Positive Faith* project. For a small charity with no ‘staff’, it is remarkable that together we have produced a wonderful new resource, free to access, for the benefit of others – and with such high ‘production values’. Vicki Morris (producer and project manager), and Director Kip Loades assisted by David

Powell, went above and beyond to deliver the project within a year. The courage that it has taken for some of those involved in the making of the films, and sharing their faith with others, should not be underestimated. These are courageous and prophetic souls. Thank you. In the pages that follow I hope the reader will see that HIV continues to affect the young and older people, those with families and many who feel alone. That the challenges faced are often complex, but in a supportive community of friendship and love, people can and do experience the strengthening and healing that comes from the Body of Christ, the church at it’s best. As we prepare during Advent to celebrate God who came to live among us, in the most unexpected of ways, I wish all our friends, colleagues, supporters and funders a very Happy and Holy Christmas.

May Christ who comes to us often poor and in need continue to surprise us in the year to come. □



*Positive Faith Launch*  
Top: Archbishop Peter Smith welcomes guests to Romero House.  
Right: Angelina Namibia and Julian Filochowski in conversation.  
Bottom: Film Director Kip Loades and Cameraman David Powell.



## CAPS News Updates

### CAPS volunteers attend CSAN Parliamentary Reception

By *Vida Boateng*

We had an amazing day we were welcomed by everyone and managed to speak to a range of people which included MPs and other organisations.

We listened to a heartfelt speech from MP Seema Kennedy (Co-Chair of the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness) and Baroness Sheila Hollins. Great to meet so many men and women involved in faith and social justice. We had a fantastic shout out from the CEO of CSAN about CAPS work supporting people living with HIV in the



*CSAN parliament reception  
Abigail Chakanyuka and Vida Boateng*

UK and the new 'Positive Faith' online resources available.

A lot of people were interested in CAPS work. Both Abigail and myself were able to network and give out as well as receive some emails and numbers to get through to. The CSAN team were very kind and Faith from CSAN was amazing at making sure we were looked after. We had a good day thank you for allowing us to go.

### Lunch and seminar at Lambeth Palace

CAPS trustee Lazarus Mungure represented CAPS at a seminar and lunch hosted by the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace in March. The event 'Serving The Common Good in a Time of Uncertainty and Austerity' welcomed a delegation from the Greek

Churches. It provided an opportunity for charities to exchange ideas; to listen to the Greek experience; and to reflect together on witnessing to the Gospel in a time of austerity and uncertainty.

### Positive Catholics and peer support groups

CAPS continues to provide pastoral support through Positive Catholics monthly meetings in Manchester and London. Retreat weekends took place again this year at Douai Abbey and Minsteracres Retreat Centre. The South West London Fellowship Group (SWLF) is now supported by a sessional worker, Abigail. SWLF members meet the first three Monday of each week in South Wimbledon. Approximately 130 individuals attended peer support groups this year. We

have provided some form of pastoral support to around 160 people this year.

### London Catalyst AGM

Caps Chair Vincent Manning was pleased to attend the London Catalyst Trust AGM which included a presentation from Holly Holder, Fellow in Health Policy at the Nuffield Trust on the challenges of providing services in a time of government cuts entitled 'Mind the Social Care Gap': *What might the future hold for users, carers and providers?* Several projects shared their work and challenges around caring for the elderly and those with disabilities. The Trust supports community projects across London. Their commitment to understanding and supporting local grass-roots initiatives was impressive.



*Strong women – ‘Rev. Ijey Ajibade, Hannah Musa and Angelina Namibia Positive Faith contributors’*

**We recommend that you visit the new Positive Faith website. Positive Faith aims to empower people to provide HIV awareness and prevention. By ‘speaking the language of faith’ and providing accurate medical and theological information, it is the first online training resource addressing HIV from a UK Christian perspective. It is devised and delivered by Christian people living with HIV and promotes the meaningful involvement of people living with HIV (MIPA) principle.**

[www.positivefaith.net](http://www.positivefaith.net)

Positive Faith is an open access internet resource developed by CAPS.

## Hannah speaks with parishioners and teachers at St. Mary and St. Michael

*By Hannah Musa*

It was a great pleasure to be invited by Fr Willie Skehan to St Mary and St Michael parish in East London to deliver two talks about HIV to mark World AIDS Day on 1st December 2016. Fr Willie had invited staff from both the primary and secondary school for the first talk, and parishioners for the second. We had no idea if anyone who be interested in learning about HIV and if anyone would turn up. We were both very encouraged when four people attended for the first session and three in the second. Even though the numbers were small it was not a surprise as we know that sadly HIV is not a popular subject

and many people believe it is something that is not relevant to them. I really enjoyed speaking to two such intimate groups as we were able to discuss issues at greater depth and the listeners could ask many more questions. I think what surprised everyone most was how prevalent HIV is in the UK and the difficulties that PLWHIV still face. As a mother living with HIV I was able to convey to the primary school teachers my fears for my son at school being bullied because he has a mother who is so open about her status and ways they can support the children and the families who are affected by HIV. I was also overwhelmed by how welcoming everyone was. It was a real joy to visit such a kind and loving church. I also shared how my faith has helped throughout my HIV

journey. I was so encouraged how much everyone appreciated my testimony. I was asked how Christians are supported by the work of CAPS. I shared how many people I knew attended the Positive Catholics Retreat and how for Christians living with HIV CAPS is the only safe space where we can express our faith; our challenges and victories in this battle with this life-long condition. I really enjoyed this opportunity to share my story and the warm reception really lifted my spirits. I look forward to having many similar opportunities to raise awareness and open people’s eyes to the reality of HIV that is unseen but very present around them.

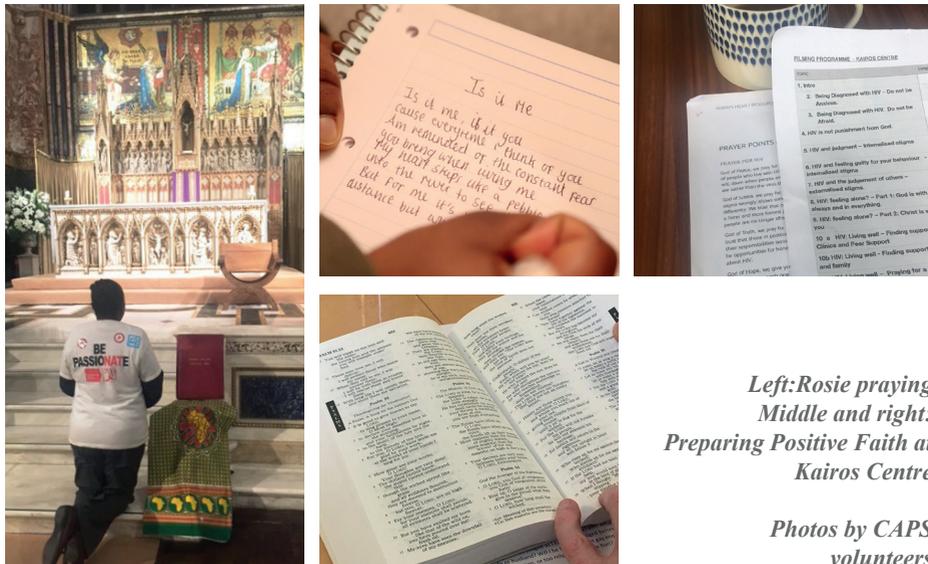
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# Snapshots of CAPS pastoral support ministry

Vincent Manning

## Insights into Pastoral Ministry

Just how challenging living with HIV can be at times, when so many think it has become a manageable illness, is difficult to communicate. Not least because those in crisis or suffering the most are the least visible. HIV doesn't feel manageable for many people. In our pastoral ministry we try to be alongside those who are suffering so that they know they are not alone. We know that it is possible, with the help of God and each other, to move beyond the place of suffering to new life and hope in Christ who saves and heals us. In the section that follows there are personal testimonies that give some insight into the challenges that people face at different times in their journey with HIV and faith. □



Left: Rosie praying  
Middle and right:  
Preparing Positive Faith at  
Kairos Centre

Photos by CAPS  
volunteers

# CAPS responding to pleas for help and Prayer

CAPS has a group of dedicated 'prayer supporters' who each commit to pray for those members who are in a time of special need, and for those who contact us through our websites and ask for help. Where requests for help are made we endeavour always to respond directly to people via email or phone. Sometimes our prayers are all we can offer. Below are a few examples of some prayer requests that we have received (names and identifying details have been changed):

**Dear Positive Catholics,** I work in England but spend 3 months each year in the country where my partner and her two children still live. Recently I was diagnosed with HIV. I have been a sinner all of my adult life. Though decent and kind in some ways I am also an uncontrollable alcoholic and sex addict. I used to live in [a poor country] and though I spend a lot of time sober and modest, when I drink I tend to go on risky sexual adventures. This has led to the biggest bombshell in my life. I fear deeply that I have infected my partner... She has to go for another test in 3 months and I am utterly devastated with guilt and worry. I am sure that my behaviour has something to do with the sexual abuse I suffered as a child. Yes I was innocent once but I think this is when I lost it. I have tried to tell my mother but she reacted with fury. My partner was a prostitute, this is how I met her. She has since given it up as I finance her life and the children. We have agreed to it all secret from our families ...no good can be obtained by breaking the heart of old people but I fear the inevitable hatred and shame. It's all my fault. I could hide from responsibility, I was always drunk when I fornicated but it was me who took the drink. My mother would instantly disown me and tell me I am damned. Is there any hope for me? Surely the lord would reject my begs for forgiveness as an attempt to save my wretched soul. I am genuinely devastated... I will make sure my partner has the drugs she will need to avoid AIDS for the rest of her life. I suppose I have left it too late to find faith but I desperately need some comfort. My partner miraculously says she does not hate me and says she will be strong. She says she still wants me to come and we can fight this thing together. Please respond to me. Is it too late to repent? Yours, John.

Please pray for me as I try to carry my cross of HIV which the Lord has blessed me with. Pray for my wife who has been supportive since I contracted HIV. Thank you

Please pray for me. I'm going to the HIV tests next Monday, but I'm almost sure at the moment that I got the virus (swollen glands in more parts of the body for two weeks, night sweats). I am single, 26. I have a loving family who has already experienced a lot of pain, and I don't want to hurt them and cause them any suffering. So please pray for my healing, if it is God's will. Alice.

Please pray for Robert. He was diagnosed with HIV in October last year. He is 28. Since then he lost his job. Also, since his landlord found out about his diagnosis he has been evicted from his rented flat. He is now homeless and is sleeping on the streets in London.

Dear Prayer supporters, I have just spoken with Sam who I asked you to pray for last month when his cancer returned rather aggressively. He has prostate cancer, but also another kind of cancer which has spread into his bones. He has supported so many of our members in his life. He knows that you are praying for him, and (although not a church-goer), he much appreciates it. He has told me he believes in the power of prayer. Despite his suffering he is optimistic that he will recover his strength, and is generally in good mood. He asked me to thank you, and give you this update. Please continue to pray for him.

I intend to quit every sin that I do obviously in order for my HIV medications to work. But its not just that. I long so much to be a better person. I do so much yearn to find faith and salvation.

□

## Lord stay with me

So I don't know whether I am the disease implanted in my blood or I'm the creation God made when he created me. Because looking in the mirror I don't know who I am. I don't see the great image he made of me.

Maybe society is controlling my mind or the doctors. Doctors telling me if I don't take my medication I will eventually die, but you know what I couldn't care less, with the countless times I tried to kill myself and took a blade to my leg and let the blood flow down my leg - the way blood was dripping down when you got crucified. Your blood was for the world whereas mine is for doctors, so does that mean I'm sacrificing my life for doctors or for you because right now it seems like every cut has a meaning.

Now every scar on my leg reminds me of what I went through, when I could have just came to you and prayed to you, but you see that's the problem. I don't see your presence anymore, I don't feel you any more, I can't feel that protection in me.

So I've given up on eating on your word and got into society a little bit, enjoying the life of a normal teenager going out with my friends and not having to worry about you because I can always come back to you on a Sunday, because that's what your there for. Because after a Sunday you're like a leaf blowing back and forth - one minute you're there the next you disappear - I can't feel your presence anymore.

But lord we all know I cant make it on my own so if I'm your daughter why are you not fighting for, fighting for me back into your arms, because I can't make it on my own. I can't walk this path without you. So please lord stay with me.

*Mary (aged early 20s) - January 2017*



John Thornhill & Rev. Simon Buckley at Positive Faith launch

John Thornhill  
**Positive Catholics Retreat: Looking into the eyes of Christ.**

(First published in The Catholic Times – Sept. 22nd 2017)

In an episode, aptly entitled “Hell” of the cult Irish TV series “Father Ted”; Ted and his curate Dougal are enduring a dismal rain-soaked holiday together in a tiny, cramped caravan. To ease the boredom Ted struggles to teach Dougal about perspective. Using plastic toy cows Ted tries to show Dougal the difference between “small”: the plastic

toys, and “far away”: the real cows outside. “OK, one last time” says Ted pointing to the toy cows, “these are *small*... but the ones *out there* are *far away*. *Small... far away...*” But Dougal doesn’t get it.

For many of us, our journey with God can feel a little like that that rain-soaked afternoon. In a world which can

feel both claustrophobic and overwhelming, the way in which we “see” God can be very confusing. Is God “far away”, transcendent, remote, distant, absent or non-existent...or is God close, imminent, present and visible in those “small” things which we so often take for granted or in those “little ones” whom we so often overlook.

The dilemma of the transcendence and immanence of God isn’t new. In many ways, the religions of the “Book”: Judaism, Christianity and Islam have all grappled with this. Is God so holy that God cannot even be named? Is God so “other” that God can only be “venerated” with robes, rubrics and ritual? Or does God “dwell among us”, “break bread with us”; and is God revealed most fully in the broken, battered body of a

naked, condemned, crucified “criminal”?

Christianity would pitch for the latter view. The “scandal of the Cross” is precisely that God reveals Godself precisely in those places where we don’t want to look: in the “despised” and in the “rejected” and in “sites of suffering” where there is marginalisation, rejection, misunderstanding, exploitation and exclusion. Indeed, the *challenge* of Christianity is that if we can’t find God in the marginalised, the excluded and the forgotten, then we won’t find God at all!

I recently attended a retreat organised by Positive Catholics at Douai Abbey for diverse women and men of faith living with HIV in the UK. The stories of these individuals are human, remarkable and painful. In so many

ways people living with HIV still experience deep stigmatisation, misunderstanding, sickness, prejudice, poverty and exclusion. But what is astonishing, is that these very people who have the least to give in material terms; give to one another an abundance of love and affection and care and esteem and friendship and fellowship and support and kindness, and with such “overflowing” generosity.

It is difficult to find words to describe this “inexplicable” contradiction. The most moving part of the retreat was in our final celebration of the Lord’s Supper: we, the people, gathered in the sanctuary with our brother priest facing us (*because God is present in his people, his little ones and his forgotten ones*). Our brother priest struggling with

his own frailty ministering “with” his sisters and brothers struggling with theirs; united in the diversity of our brokenness in love for one another and in love for Jesus. A Lutheran brother read the word, gay men shared their prayers, children brought their gifts; and our celebration ended with joyful African dance. God was

abundantly here. God was lovingly with us.

The *gift* that is shared by women and men whom the world chosens to forget, is quite simply and quite astonishingly the revelation of God, Godself! If we cannot learn to seek the face of God in the poor, the marginalised and the excluded, we will never see God at all. God will

always remain nameless, obscured by holy smoke, formless and unknowable. But when we look into the eyes of the forgotten, then rather like the disciples who encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus, we suddenly realise we are looking into the eyes of Christ and he is looking back at us.



### Sample Bidding Prayers for the Sunday before World AIDS Day (Dec 1<sup>st</sup>)

## Prayer resources

Friday December 1<sup>st</sup> marks the 30<sup>th</sup> annual World AIDS Day. Let us remember all those living with HIV and AIDS. We pray for all those infected or affected by HIV all over the world. We pray for the doctors, nurses, scientists and carers who work for healing in this devastating pandemic. We ask God to bless the work of CAFOD and Caritas International, who serve the poor in the name of the Church. We pray for all those involved in the ‘Positive Catholics’ HIV ministry here in the UK. May God fill all of us with compassion and solidarity.

As we mark World AIDS Day on December 1<sup>st</sup>, let us pray for all people infected and affected by HIV and AIDS throughout the world. Let us pray that God’s justice and mercy will extend to all who suffer in this pandemic. Let us pray for doctors and nurses, and for all Christians who put God’s love into action. We remember too, the ministry of Catholics for AIDS Prevention and Support, here in the UK, praying especially for the members of the Positive Catholics HIV peer support communities in Britain.

## Vincent Manning House of Lords Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement.

CSAN has submitted a response to the House of Lords Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement to inform their work on citizenship and civic engagement in the twenty-first century.

The response, drawing evidence from CSAN members, focussed on the positive civic engagement of volunteers who build genuine relationships with the marginalised and are inspired to engage with civil society to address the issues which affect them.

The response tells of grassroots initiatives which rely on volunteering and foster a sense of

commitment to wider society, and how faith communities provide both the structure and the motivation for these encounters. The submission also reports members’ feedback that the major barrier to active citizenship, above all, is the isolation caused by poverty.

The full response can be read on the CSAN website. The following submission was provided by CAPS to inform the CSAN response:

### Citizenship & Civic Engagement - CAPS input to CSAN consultation

#### Promoting engagement through belonging as members of Churches and faith based organisations.

Volunteering obviously promotes a sense of commitment to wider society through people giving of their time and talents for some common good

beyond themselves. Relationships are formed that connect people informally and formally. Involvement in and familiarity with the lives of others, especially those who are marginalised or disadvantaged in some ways, raises awareness generally through interpersonal encounter. Prejudices that exist in society and divide communities are challenged when genuine personal encounters take place. In turn this can lead volunteers to engage with civic society to address social and structural issues which exacerbate disadvantage.

In CAPS for example: Many of our volunteers have engaged with local authorities in South London to raise awareness of the importance of faith for many people diagnosed or living with HIV in the family (PLWH). Our volunteers attended several consultation meetings to decide upon the range of support

services that are funded by Local Authorities (LA) for those living with HIV. They asserted the importance of faith and church membership as one element in the range of medical, psychological, and social support that should be provided for PLWH locally. The input from our volunteers raised awareness amongst LA Commissioners of how religious/faith affiliation can be an important source of social support for PLWH, and as such, enable PLWH to support each other, reduce isolation, improve adherence to medication etc... As a result of our input 4 LA's in South London have included Faith specific HIV peer support groups as part of their Service Level Agreements.

### The value of grass roots social support

Beyond the formal recognition in policy of the importance of faith specific support to address

the needs of PLWH, the actual ('social') support that is provided between members of our groups is of immense benefit. Many people are helped 'informally' in ways that are of wider community benefit. Not least by assisting individuals at times of crisis so that more expensive statutory interventions can be avoided. Eg. Our members have provided safe accommodation to others who have faced street homelessness; the friendship provided between members reduces isolation and the likelihood of descent into mental ill-health; advice and guidance shared between members encourages individuals to maintain adherence to medication, which in turn reduces likelihood of onward transmission of HIV (as adherence to medication reduces the virus in the body); members have accompanied those newly diagnosed to medical appointments etc...

In summary – local and national govt can promote civic engagement (in it's widest sense) by firstly recognising the central importance of faith & religious belonging in the lives of many people in society. Secondly by enabling churches & faith groups to provide networks of support to be set up or maintained for those who experience some form of disadvantage, volunteers are mobilised and disadvantaged populations effectively reached. The range of benefits of social support (eg regarding access to welfare benefits; housing support; reducing isolation; improved self-esteem; improved mental health) that can be provided, especially in small, 'grass roots' locally relevant ways, should not be underestimated.

A little funding goes a very long way in such small locally based community groups. However,

the requirements of LA contracts, monitoring and evaluation requirements, and even such simple things as attendance at meetings with budget holders during 'office hours', can be a serious barrier to the involvement and mobilisation of 'grass roots' voluntary based groups.

If LA or national govt. agencies wish to maximise the potential of local voluntary groups those tasked with defining local need (and therefore funding priorities) need to get out from behind their desks and meet local people in the community, rather than expect hard pressed volunteers to navigate often complex processes and procedures that are required before access to LA funding or support is gained.

### Barriers to engagement – Material and social poverty

The single most

important barrier to active citizenship is poverty.

After material poverty, cuts to local services intended to help those in need are often so stretched, that effective help is simply not available or is insufficient.

Prevention is better than cure: The lack of some support for people in need, when they need it, means that often people do not receive help until the present need becomes a larger crisis. Obviously this is undesirable for the individual concerned. It is also inefficient and results in greater social and economic cost to wider society.

In our experience those who are poorest, and most disadvantaged; those who lack education and social support networks; those with mental or physical health problems; families and individuals in debt etc.... when they do go to state

or charitable agencies for support, they are often passed from one agency to another, and their particular problem remains unaddressed. This tends to wear people down. It also wears down more able volunteers who act in a supportive role for others.

Thus the individuals in need of some support are left without any support; and those who are trying to support them become frustrated and may give up. In both cases hope may be lost, and engagement with civic society, including volunteering, becomes a frustrating or pointless activity.

### Church at it's best: The value of local people who care in local communities

At it's best 'church' is a place where people feel a sense of belonging. A place where people feel involved and valued, and in turn care about others. A place marked by a

shared sense of commitment to each other.

Civil society (and civic engagement) likewise depends upon creating communities where people feel a sense of belonging through the relationships they have with others in their neighbourhood, borough, city or village.

Especially in poorer neighbourhoods, and among marginalised groups, the day to day challenges just to survive leave little time or room to devote to the needs of others in the wider community. If one is worried about how to pay the rent, or put food on the table; if one is worried about the ill health of a partner or family member; if one has two or three poorly paid jobs; in the single parent household with a teenager excluded from school, or at risk of offending; there is little additional time to devote to any form of civic

engagement.

Yet it is precisely in these poorest communities, with the greatest domestic problems, that community cohesion is most needed. Without some sense of community and belonging, engagement in wider civil society is impossible.

However, despite all the challenges it is often amongst the poorest people that a sense of responsibility and care for others is most in evidence, if we look for it. Kindness, solidarity and care for each other enacted daily in small quiet ways. We witness this continually between the members of Positive Catholics.

In the poorest and most disadvantaged communities, and with the most marginalised groups, more resources are needed. Specifically community and youth workers who have a sense of belonging

within the given community or group; who have the time and commitment to dedicate to mobilising local people in mutually supportive forms of local civic engagement. Not only for the social support that is provided, but also to empower local people to challenge and confront, those situations, structures and organisations which they identify as contributing to their alienation and exclusion from wider society.

□

*Right: Positive Faith launch, Q & A with members of Project team*

## Spotlight on Positive Faith Resources

Vincent Manning

### The Passion of Christ Living with HIV

It can be harrowing to listen to the pain in other people's words. Mary's poem on page 13 is a good example of that. Fr. John Sherrington CP, has shared his gifts as a priest with members of the Positive Catholics community for many years now. He belongs to 'The Passionists' religious order, who keep alive the dangerous memory of the Passion of Christ, with those who suffer, in a suffering world. The Passionist charism to love tenderly, include radically, and demand that society acts justly to those on the margins, has informed Positive Faith. A 'Cross and Passion' spirituality manifests itself through the theological and pastoral approach taken. To paraphrase the late Austin Smith CP, this is an incarnate spirituality which understands the Cross as a sign of commitment to 'live with', and when necessary 'suffer with' sisters and brothers who, like Jesus, are still exiled outside the walls. This willingness and desire sums up Positive Faith. The videos can assist us as we start conversations in our churches and schools: Through the testimony of people living with HIV Positive Faith gently proclaims Christ who is with us, and loves us with a passion, especially when we suffer. 'He has borne our sickness and understands our pain'. (Isaiah 53:4) □



Jim McManus

## Talking about the body of Christ still living with HIV

On 11th October the Archbishop of Southwark, his Anglican counterpart and Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP, launched a CAPS' series of videos on HIV and coping, and a new website, to a room full of professionals, community activists and people living with HIV.

The videos were funded by an agency of Government – Public Health England (PHE). It was co-ordinated and led by CAPS, who won the funding through a competitive process, last year. Now *Positive Faith* is live and accessible. The CAPS team have done remarkably well to deliver the project on time, and to the high

standard that they promised.

At a time when it feels like faith is sometimes an unwelcome word in the public sector, this resource will focus on how people of faith make sense of preventing HIV, living with it, and supporting those affected by it. That's pretty special. All those involved deserve high praise for this innovative set of resources.

I have been privileged – both as a Catholic and a public health professional – to be for both PHE and CAPS, the sponsor and supporter of this project. It's something I will never forget.

While HIV might be manageable for many people, it's definitely no walk in the park. Stigma, mental health issues, problems with side effects from medications (liver function, bone density, kidney issues

and more) the unpredictability of a long-term condition and the fact people with HIV living long term are at heightened risk of some cancers, heart disease and other diseases, as well as showing signs of long-term cognitive problems, mean what was once an early death has been replaced by a need to find strategies to live and cope long term. If that's not enough there are still too many people – especially women – being diagnosed very late, when the virus has damaged the body, the risk of death is much closer and life expectancy is significantly reduced. With treatment they can regain some health, but they still have ongoing health issues worse than if they had been diagnosed early.

The successes of medication can bring many more psychosocial challenges – coping, relationships, inclusion,

stigma. I could go on. HIV continues to present challenges to people, and because of that, it continues to present challenges to our churches. And that's where this resource comes in. People with and affected by HIV are still on many margins, hence the need for this project.

For people of faith, their faith is intimately linked to their health and their lives. There is ample scientific research on that. There is also ample research that being who we are, and being valued

for that, is crucial to full humanity. So being able to understand where HIV affects us, whether living with it, being in the family or friendship circle of someone living with it, or seeking to remain HIV negative, must include the faith dimension for people of faith.

For those of us of faith we have an aching need for God at our core as the Psalm says, 'like the deer pants for running streams', and our public services and faith communities insisting we

should compartmentalise bits of that does nothing less than disintegrate us, and dehumanise us. Those who say 'leave your faith at the door of this hospital' but claim to value diversity and personalisation, or 'leave your HIV at the door of the Church' but claim to welcome all, radically undermine the very values they purport to affirm and the scientific evidence behind it; the whole person is called to health, not just the bits we feel we can deal with.

### Director of Public Health England, Duncan Selbie, praises 'Positive Faith'

'Faith plays a critical part for many in keeping well and in helping others. The Catholics for AIDS Prevention and Support charity has taken a lead on AIDS prevention and they have created a video series called Positive Faith. This programme, funded by PHE's HIV Innovation Fund and sponsored by Jim McManus, Director of Public Health for Hertfordshire, is a fabulous, pragmatic expression of faith being about life and in this case people living with HIV.'

*Duncan Selbie's Friday Message  
Public Health England 13/10/2017*

A further reason is that this project is a tool to inclusion in our churches of people with and affected by HIV. For us, that must start from encounter with God and encounter with our affected neighbours because of love for God and for them. The Churches have been patchy at that.

Finally, the nature of HIV has much to teach us about health. People with HIV, like those with cancer or many conditions, play a hugely important role for the Church. Living with HIV is about adjustment to a changing reality of health experience and expectation, and says much about what we can be despite a condition which remains life threatening, as well being manageable. Now, isn't that a rich model to reshape our Christian understanding of health in this life with?

*Positive Faith* expresses both the joys and rejoicing, the coping, crying to the Lord, the wildness as well as places of inclusion, and the expectation of God's people with and affected by HIV.

The task for the institutions of all our Churches now is to proclaim God is with them, with us, and in doing so, include, love and learn from each other.

I am constantly moved to have been the sponsor for this project. It's been amazing to see Church and health agencies work together so very constructively, with mutual respect. It's been a privilege to see the witness of so many with and affected by HIV. It's been an opportunity for me personally to reaffirm that my faith and my professional public health life can interact positively. This will be a powerful resource. I

commend it to you.

*Professor Jim McManus is director of Public Health for Hertfordshire, HIV Lead for the UK Association of Directors of Public Health, and vice chair of the Health and Social Care Advisory Group of the Catholic Bishops Conference in England and Wales.* □

*Right: Vida Boateng presenting at Positive Faith Pilot Workshop, Waterloo*

## Supporting CAPS

If you have felt encouraged in your faith, if you have been inspired by what you've read in this newsletter, please consider donating your time, your talent, or your financial support.



You can donate by contributing online through our secure PayPal connection: scroll down to the lower left side of our website, [www.caps-uk.org](http://www.caps-uk.org). Or call / email us for information on setting up a direct debit.

You can also support us by signing up for 'Give as You Live', an online service that collects donations from over 4,000 retailers – sending a small percentage of your purchase's value to the charity of your choice. Register for free at <http://give.as/charity/catholics-for-aids-prevention-and-support-caps> or via [www.giveasyoulive.com](http://www.giveasyoulive.com); search and select 'Catholics for AIDS Prevention and Support'; and go shopping online with one of their registered retailers. At no cost to you, the website collects a donation from the retailer and sends it to CAPS.

If you have skills that you're willing to share in marketing, research, policy writing, computing, press/media, finance, or fundraising, please contact Vincent at [chair@caps-uk.org](mailto:chair@caps-uk.org) to arrange a conversation.

It is your generosity that allows CAPS and Positive Catholics to support and strengthen people who are in need.



Victoria Morris

## Unapologetic faith

*Project manager and film producer Vicki Morris reflects upon the past year*

It's been a stimulating year working on the *Positive Faith* project - not least working alongside Vincent Manning and Director Kip Loades (and many others) to put this vision into action, but delving deep into the intersection and nuance of the 'journey' through HIV and Christianity. My Christian background helped me understand faith language, and motivation, but only when I embarked on this project did I begin to understand how the issues could be addressed, how questions could be answered satisfactorily for a wide audience, or what the questions were in the first place. Tired of experiencing the church as a kind of exclusive club,

more concerned with maintaining its boundaries so that it forgot how to be 'Christian', I became agnostic some years back.

I have been struck over and over during this project by the nature of faith. Those interviewed for the films and the working group, have impressed me with their 'lack of apology' for their faith. They have more reasons than I, to feel hurt, and step away from or apologise for the church. However, pure faith transcends, it's part of you, perhaps like a limb. When Writing on *Positive Faith* Jim McManus reinforced my thoughts on this matter "*I could no more renounce my Catholic faith than I could fly unaided. And I don't feel the need to justify why.*"

And Graeme, interviewed for the videos, spoke about how when he decided to go back to

church and the practice of his faith, he lost friends in the gay community who felt that he was aligning himself with a homophobic institution. This highlighted how the 'navigation' for gay Christians often requires choices to be made between two identities, two communities - and all before considering the impact HIV has on sense of self, belonging, and the need for support. It also highlights what faith is. An aspect of identity, something treasured, and costly.

All this results in a resource founded on a very straight forward theology of 'welcome': in imitation of Christ, the challenges of radical welcome and inclusion are offered to churches; and to those of us in the world of secular HIV work it presents Christian faith as something that can't be ignored and must be respected, it

needs to be worked with, and this is how. The unapologetic faith of the participants claims a faith and spirituality accessible for anyone living with HIV and proclaims God's welcome. And it makes faith as an intrinsic aspect of health more accessible to those of us in the secular HIV sectors. This resource means Welcome.

When I presented some of the films to Public Health England earlier this year, my colleague Dominic, (also there presenting a Terrence Higgins Trust project), said how powerful this is - church speaking to church, Christians to Christians, rather than the professional HIV body telling the church to get their act together. I think that the project's success and acceptance by the mainstream church press is evidence of this being the right approach.

Over my many years in the HIV sector, the term 'journey' has been used increasingly to make sense of what happens after an HIV diagnosis. This resource is also about 'navigation' in that journey. Support services are shrinking - those 'face to face' guiding services that depend upon the relationship between the professional worker and client to navigate a way through the trickiest and hardest of times, overcoming barriers often with small steps - are expensive and the first to go. I wouldn't have imagined that an online 'service' would help with any but the least in need. The proof will be in the pudding, but we have created a resource which is theologically honest and medically responsible. It has tackled difficult topics without shame. We hope that people facing the challenges of living with HIV will find the films

to be of actual pastoral support. The closest a person might get to the experience of 'sounding out' your worries and uncertainties along the journey, and getting something back along the lines of peer support. We also hope this resource will encourage and enable more churches to become communities of welcome for those living with or affected by HIV so that those important 'face to face' encounters, so necessary to guide any of us on our journey, can take place with greater sensitivity and less anxiety, for the benefit of the whole community. Welcome to *Positive Faith!* I invite you to use it.



## What people said about *Positive Faith*

The resource and films within it were subject to a pilot process those who attended these events found *Positive Faith* clear, honest, comprehensive, accessible and with wide appeal. When asked what they liked best about it they said:

- Real people, real faith, real life.
  - The variety of videos available which offer support and provide education.
  - That it ‘comes from the people’ most affected by HIV. The voices of PLWH are heard with authority.
  - It is very professionally produced and the videos are excellent - beautifully shot. It is wonderful to have people sharing their experience including its emotional impact with a wider audience. The video on healing was particularly good as it showed that even if a physical cure isn’t found, healing occurs at other levels and is valid. A wonderful resource - many congratulations.
  - [That it is] open and inclusive. Tackles prejudice in a warm and embracing way.’
  - [That] it’s very accessible, in several shortish sections rather than one long piece. People are speaking in their own words about their own situation and experiences. Personally it will give me positive thoughts and change my personal view as a person and woman
  - [That] it gives the opportunity to open conversation and discussion as well as reducing isolation and stigma
  - [That it is] a resource to sign post clients to, [I’m] not aware of anything similar.
- A nurse**

*Positive Faith* has received many other messages of support including the ones below:

- I understand that faith is important to a lot of people with HIV and now I understand how, it helps start a Conversation.
- It is a useful tool to start conversations as well as to reassure people living with HIV. It is transferable into a range of settings and can be used easily by a range of professionals
- Christopher Chessun  
Anglican Bishop of  
Southwark**  
The collaboration of Public Health England and the churches in the production of *Positive Faith* is a considerable achievement. It shows that the language of faith can be as important to good health as medical terminology for many people. Produced by people living with HIV from all Christian traditions, *Positive Faith* shows what can be achieved when Christians work together. It also shows us that there are gifts to be brought to the church from those who sometimes feel excluded.
- Peter Smith  
RC Archbishop of  
Southwark**  
This project demonstrates the importance of taking faith seriously in matters of public health. Faith is an essential aspect of health and wellbeing for many people in many communities. Spiritual health and physical health are connected.
- Gideon  
(Rev Canon Prof G.B.  
Byamugisha - Uganda )**  
CONGRATULATIONS! As we continue the struggle *POSITIVE FAITH* and CAPS continue to show that *For Every Goliath, There Is A David With an Effective Stone!!!*
- Rachel**  
Congratulations on a wonderful new resource from CAPS – I thought it was really excellent. It was beautifully filmed and it was a balance with information and emotion. All those who volunteered and participated were very inspiring.

## Notices & Dates

### World AIDS Day Friday 1st December 2017

Remember to include prayers for all those affected by HIV and AIDS in your church on Sunday 26th Nov. or Dec. 3rd. Use the prayers provided on any of CAPS websites, or compose prayers of your own and share them by email with CAPS. People living with HIV are often unseen and unheard. Our public prayers around World AIDS Day give us an opportunity to show our concern; a small step to express solidarity with all those affected.

### World AIDS Day events and services

#### Mass and showing of *Positive Faith* resources

Mass will be celebrated to mark world AIDS Day at The Church of the Immaculate Conception, 114 Mount Street, London, W1K 3AH on Monday Dec. 4th at 6pm. Fr. David Stewart SJ presiding, in the presence of the Lord Mayor of Westminster, music by Beacon Music Group. **All are welcome.** Refreshments available afterwards in the parish hall, with a showing of the Positive Faith films resources.

#### CAPS Christmas Party

All members of Positive Catholics and the South West London Fellowship Peer Support groups are invited to have some fun before Christmas in south London on Saturday Dec. 9th. Children welcome with parents. Santa is coming too.

### Christian Communities Welcoming LGBT People

In London the RC Diocese of Westminster extends a special welcome to LGBT people at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, 114 Mount Street, London, W1K 3AH. Especially at the 17.30 Mass each 2nd and 4th Sunday of each month. [lgbtcatholicswestminster@gmail.com](mailto:lgbtcatholicswestminster@gmail.com) - [www.lgbtcatholicswestminster.org](http://www.lgbtcatholicswestminster.org)

The 'House of Rainbow' also extends a welcome for LGBT Christian people: email: [info@houseofrainbow.org](mailto:info@houseofrainbow.org) or [houseofrainbow@hotmail.com](mailto:houseofrainbow@hotmail.com)  
Web: [www.houseofrainbow.org](http://www.houseofrainbow.org)

For more information on 'The Passionists' visit [passionists-uk.org](http://passionists-uk.org)

#### A 'Must' for your Diary

Why not pick a date now and mark your calendar, even if it is 2018, when you will use the *Positive Faith* resource in some way in your local community. Make a start, begin a conversation with others in your church, college or school.

## Making Your Church or Clinic a More Welcoming Place for People Living with HIV

Last year's 'All Are Welcome' Card was a great success and we are printing it again this year. It is an easy way to let people know that they have found a welcoming church. It is an easy way to raise awareness about HIV and faith in your congregation or your local clinic. Together with the THT 'Faith in Communities Project' we have designed this card to be ecumenical, and to offer the best possible points of contact.

We invite you to cut this page out. Share it with clergy or other church leaders. Have a discussion with your pastor or parish council about what it means to display this card at your church. Stick it on your church bulletin board. Bring it to the clinic or surgery. Let people know.

Below is some basic information about HIV that can help shape the discussion:

- There are more than 35 million people infected with HIV globally.
- Although medicines have become more available, only 32% of children and 41% of adults who are eligible, actually received HIV treatment in 2014. Millions remain in need of essential treatment, care and support, especially in Africa, a continent that cries out for justice.
- 108,000 people are infected with HIV in the UK.
- Approximately 50,000 are living with HIV in London. (Southwark Diocese has the highest resident number of people living with HIV.)
- An estimated 1 in 5 people living with HIV in the UK do not know that they are infected.
- We know that there are significant numbers of Catholics and Christians living with HIV.
- It is very likely that in your Parish there are people living with HIV, or families who have a member living with HIV.
- Catholics for AIDS Prevention and Support (CAPS) is the only national Christian response in the UK (Archbishop Peter Smith is a Patron).
- The 'Positive Catholics' ministry is the only national Christian pastoral ministry to people living with HIV in the UK.

Laminated copies are available by mail for a small donation to cover printing and packing. Other Positive Catholics materials are also available for download from our website. A single flier or poster might be the lifeline that someone needs.





# All are welcome in this place

For faith sensitive HIV support

Email: [info@caps-uk.org](mailto:info@caps-uk.org)

Phone: 07505 608 655

Websites: [www.caps-uk.org](http://www.caps-uk.org)

[www.positivecatholics.com](http://www.positivecatholics.com)

For general HIV advice & support

THT Direct: 0808802 1221

[www.POSITIVEFAITH.net](http://www.POSITIVEFAITH.net)

