

AJANews 91 - March 2010

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HOLY FATHER: MARRIAGE & SERVICE

In the light of the Gospel message, you are aware of the need to encourage the Catholics of Uganda to appreciate fully the sacrament of marriage in its unity and indissolubility, and the sacred right to life. I urge you to help them, priests as well as the lay faithful, to resist the seduction of a materialistic culture of individualism which has taken root in so many countries. Continue to call for lasting peace based on justice, generosity towards those in need and a spirit of dialogue and reconciliation.

Continue to sustain all who with generous hearts assist displaced persons and orphans from war-torn areas. Encourage those who care for people afflicted by poverty, AIDS and other diseases, teaching them to see in those whom they serve the suffering face of Jesus (cf. Mt 25:40).

Excerpted from the address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the bishops of Uganda on their ad limina visit to Rome, 5 March 2010

CONGO: AJAN-ACE MEETING

Ignatian spirituality key to Jesuit AIDS ministry

Jesuits involved in AIDS ministry in sub-Saharan Africa have identified Ignatian spirituality and Gospel values as key factors underpinning their contribution to the struggle against the pandemic across the continent.

From 27 February to 2 March, Jesuits implementing AIDS-related programmes across DRC, as well as in Burundi and Togo, gathered in Kikwit, western DRC, for an encounter organised by the social apostolate of the Central African Province (ACE) and AJAN House.

As they shared about their work and challenges, the Jesuits identified ways of developing their service and pinpointed the objectives, priorities and specificity of their contribution. All agreed that Christian values - drawn from the Gospel and from Ignatian spirituality - are the driving force determining the nature of their mission: *We are conscious that we cannot engage in AIDS ministry just like everyone else. The specificity, or Jesuit hallmark, comes from our Ignatian spirituality, which puts people who are infected or affected at the centre of our interventions, integrating men and women in their totality: heart, spirit, body, mind.*

Their conclusions echoed those reached by previous AJAN encounters: an Assembly in Nairobi in September 2003, for Jesuits involved AIDS-related ministry across sub-Saharan Africa and beyond; a workshop in Nairobi in January 2007, held as part of the Ignatian Family Encounter, which also drew Jesuits and lay people from across the continent; regional meetings in Lomé (April 2007), Harare (November 2007), Lusaka (April 2008, May 2009), Bujumbura (January 2009).

This approach prompts the Jesuits to seek out those who are most vulnerable, the option for the poor; to pursue excellence (*Magis*) in service and the greater good; to develop an approach based on *cura personalis* and to offer spiritual accompaniment to people with HIV along the lines of Ignatian spirituality; and to undertake theological reflection about HIV.

In terms of priorities, the Jesuits listed as paramount the holistic care of people living with HIV, orphans and vulnerable children. This includes covering their medical, nutritional, psychosocial, spiritual, educational and financial needs, and defending their rights. But this is not enough: those infected and affected need to feel that they belong, that they are part of a family, where they are called to support others as well as receive care and consolation. On the prevention front, raising awareness among youth - who are especially vulnerable to HIV - was listed as a priority, especially working through Jesuit high schools.

In order to offer effective care and prevention services, Jesuits need ongoing formation to boost their skills and knowledge about HIV and AIDS and related services.

Participants highlighted this as a priority for AJAN; they also listed professional structures, clarity of objectives and transparent financial management as necessary for sustainable services.

The meeting served as an opportunity to recommend ways of improving not only individual programmes but also coordination at province and assistancy level. Fr Ferdinand Muhgirwa SJ, ACE Social Apostolate Coordinator, and Fr Paterne Mombé SJ, AJAN Associate Coordinator, emphasised the importance of reinforcing links between AJAN and the Province and of *getting organised as a body*.

The participants called for an AIDS Coordinator in ACE Province, who could encourage and enhance their efforts on the ground, promote formation, research and reflection, and liaise with the social apostolate of the province and with AJAN.

The fact that the Society of Jesus has an AIDS network that covers sub-Saharan Africa drew praise from a Congolese bishop who was invited to address the participants on 1 March. *I encourage you, as a congregation actively engaged in this field in Africa, and I thank you for the work you do*, said Mgr Fulgence Muteba of Katanga Diocese. *There are many congregations and dioceses engaged in the struggle but your continental network is certainly very effective.*

Mgr Muteba has written about the struggle against the pandemic; one of his books, *Combattre efficacement le VIH/SIDA en Afrique noire* (Fighting HIV/AIDS effectively in black Africa), was published by CEPAS in November 2007. Emphasising the need to be aware of the many complex facets of HIV and AIDS in Africa, the bishop attributes the rapid spread of the virus in this continent partly to a *deep moral crisis*, aggravated by poverty and hunger, *a real gateway to HIV and AIDS*, which make people vulnerable and rob them of their sense of dignity.

At the root of this poverty, and of the continued dominance of AIDS in Africa, is the unjust global order that keeps the continent down: *We should not only multiply structures to fight ignorance and make speeches about morality. We need mechanisms to fight poverty and the impoverishment of Africa otherwise it will be very difficult to fight the pandemic. There is a forgotten dimension, which can be activated by international solidarity.*

Advocating for global justice and solidarity is part of what the bishop termed a *moral counter-offensive*, in which the continent should rediscover and abide by traditional moral and ethical values like mutual respect, love, fidelity. Sexual education should find its place in this context, he said.

However, cautioned Mgr Muteba, the focus should not be on strategies but on the person: *The human being must be at the centre of all our strategies, which should address people directly, giving them a sense of personal responsibility.*

The bishop's presentation was followed by a lively exchange in which the Jesuits shared their experiences of AIDS ministry. Repeatedly affirming that he was edified by what he heard, Mgr Muteba urged the Jesuits to be *agents provocateurs*, with their testimony, ministry and theology, to bring about a more compassionate and informed response to the pandemic within the Church.

***Jesuit AIDS ministries represented at the AJAN-ACE meeting
Foyer Louis de Gonzague, Kikwit***

Fr Jean-Baptiste Mimunu SJ

The *Foyer Louis de Gonzague* (Aloysius Gonzaga Forum) organises awareness and education sessions in the Sacré-Coeur Parish in Kikwit, working through nine parish centres. Around 100 people with HIV are supported in partnership with the *Association de Solidarité et de Vie Constructive* (ASVC - Association for Positive Living and Solidarity). Some benefit from vocational training: on 28 February 2010, a group of 15 graduated from a year-long sewing course. Poultry and pork-rearing and soya, maize and peanut plantations help to meet the nutritional needs of people with HIV and to raise money. Fr Jean-Baptiste, the Coordinator, also helps people who approach him in secret, who are afraid to reveal their positive status. Some 50 AIDS orphans are helped to go to school: fees, uniforms and school supplies are covered.

Foyer Louis de Gonzague Sadisana, Kikwit

Fr Xavier Zabala SJ

A group of students of the *Collège Sadisana* was set up in the 2006-2007 academic year with the aim of raising awareness about HIV and AIDS. The group is run by a teacher and two final-year students and has 30 members. Weekly thematic discussion meetings are held.

Parlons-SIDA, Christ the King parish, Kisangani

Fr Jean-Pierre Luzolo SJ

Fr Jean-Pierre says *Parlons-SIDA* is the only organisation offering real prevention and sustained care and support services for people with HIV in Kisangani. A range of awareness activities is organised: video-forums; collaboration with associations set up by *Parlons-SIDA* itself; the publication of leaflets; monthly meetings attended by members of other parishes too. *Parlons-SIDA* has 106 beneficiaries with HIV, who are thoroughly followed up with medical, psycho-social and material support, and 156 orphans who attend 19 schools in the city. Weekly support group meetings are held, attended by an average of 50 people, with prayers, sharing and discussion.

Parlons-SIDA, St Pierre Claver Parish, Bukavu

Fr Martin Bahati SJ

This parish-based project is implemented in a tragic scenario of widespread sexual

violence and consequent steep HIV prevalence, outcomes of long-running conflict. *Parlons-SIDA* counsels women who are victims of sexual assault and assists them in other ways too, seeking to reunite families torn apart by this crime.

For people who are sick, a weekly Eucharist is held and attended by many who come from beyond the parish. Monthly meetings for people with HIV provide the opportunity to gather and to support each other, to share food - the shortage of which is pronounced in Bukavu - and to pray together. *Parlons-SIDA* also advocates for access to antiretroviral drugs (ARVs). Then there is the Fr Etienne social centre, which organises educational and other activities for orphans and vulnerable children. Prevention activities target university students attending the many tertiary academic institutions in Bukavu.

Collège Bonsomi, Kinshasa

Ismaël Matambura SJ

Collège Bonsomi has 1180 students and more than 65 teachers. Films related to HIV and AIDS, to sexuality, to moral and value-based education, are screened. For World AIDS Day 2009, a film entitled *Promesse d'amour* (Promise of Love) was shown. *Collège Bonsomi* has a magazine issued every trimester, *la Revue Bwato*, which regularly features articles about HIV and AIDS. Future plans include training a team of peer educators.

Centre Espérance Loyola, Togo

Fr Bernard Hounnougbo SJ

The *Centre Espérance Loyola* (CEL - Loyola Hope Centre) is a social work of the Society of Jesus in Togo, founded and run by the Jesuits of the West Africa Province with the support of AJAN. The mission of the CEL is to accompany and strengthen the capacity of the population of Agoè-Nyivé (where the centre is based) and its environs, to respond to the pandemic. Key to the services of the CEL is prevention of HIV among youth and families, through awareness, *éducation à la vie et à l'amour* (education for life and love), voluntary counselling and testing (VCT). People living with HIV and their families are offered spiritual, psychosocial, nutritional and educational support and their rights are defended through advocacy for good treatment and against stigma and discrimination. All these services are underpinned by research and formation for those involved in this work.

Service Yezu Mwiza (SYM), Burundi

Fr Désiré Yamuremye SJ

Service Yezu Mwiza (SYM - "Good Jesus" in Kirundi), is a comprehensive AIDS ministry of the Jesuits of Rwanda-Burundi, which was officially launched on 19 January 2009, after its first year of activity. Based in Bujumbura, SYM reaches inaccessible rural parishes around the capital, offering holistic care to more than 840 people with HIV and their families as well as nearly 1000 orphans and vulnerable children who benefit from educational and other support. In April 2009, SYM was registered as a qualified centre for the provision of ARVs. Another range of services is offered in the sphere of prevention, with VCT and awareness-raising in parishes. In particular, SYM emphasises the reduction of mother-to-child transmission of the virus, one of the main causes of infant mortality in Burundi.

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