

AJANews 92 - April 2010

AJAN: A mission of restoring hope & life

Kenya: Breaking the loneliness

The first encounter

Being part of a discordant couple

Kenya: Kim's supuu

Blessed Anuarite Nengapeta is a young Sister of the Holy Family of Kisangani. She worked at Wamba as a teacher. She was murdered resisting the sexual demands of a rebel leader in the Congo in 1964. St Aloysius Gonzaga is a young Jesuit who selflessly gave his life caring for victims of the deadly plague in Rome in 1591. We entrust the African Jesuit AIDS Network to their prayer and protection.

AJAN: A MISSION OF RESTORING HOPE & LIFE

Fr Paterne Mombé SJ, Coordinator designate of AJAN, writes to his friends, benefactors, companions and relatives at Easter:

For the past four years, great moments in the life of the Church, such as Easter, have been for me an opportunity to write and tell you about the key events and experiences in my life at the service of our brothers and sisters touched by the AIDS pandemic. I was writing as the founding Director of the *Centre Espérance Loyola* (CEL - Loyola Hope Centre) in Lomé.

This year, I write from a different position; that of transition, of passage. Since January 2010, the CEL has a new director; and since February I am part of the AJAN House team. In this time of transition, two companions occupy a special place in my life.

On one hand, there is Fr Bernard Hounnougbo SJ, my successor in Lomé. The short time we spent together before he took over tells me that he is surely the best man for the job. Over a year ago, I invited him to a workshop of training of trainers organized by AJAN and the CEL, to share his considerable experience in the education of youth for HIV prevention. This was in March 2009, and neither he nor I knew that the Lord was at work, shepherding us beyond our imagination and expectations. With him, I believe, the CEL will move towards new and greater horizons.

On the other hand, there is Fr Michael Czerny SJ whom I am called to succeed mid-year. For the past seven years, he has been to me an extraordinary mentor, companion and father, who has known how to call the best out of me. Recently, he recalled the day in February 2003 when I first walked into the new AJAN office in Nairobi; initial steps that would open the door to tremendous and unforeseeable experiences. Here again, the Lord, master of history, had been at work, shepherding us beyond our imagination and expectations. Today, Fr Michael is called to carry out a mission at the level of the universal Church, namely assisting the President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana. This, surprisingly, has everything to do with what he was doing before founding and developing AJAN. I believe that he will show creative fidelity and will bring much to Justice and Peace, helping its passage towards

new and greater horizons, *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*.

As for me, here I am, having to step into his large shoes. Here I am, like the poor man who sleeps at night worried about what the next day might bring, like the disciple in front of the empty tomb, in fear and trembling. Yet, thanks to the Lord, not at all without hope. Benefactors and friends of CEL and AJAN, my companions and relatives, have always been close, sharing in this noble mission of restoring hope and life especially among the weakest and neediest. I believe that the Risen Lord Jesus, who entrusts us with this mission of restoring hope and life in others, will continue to shepherd us beyond our imagination and expectations.

KENYA: BREAKING THE LONELINESS

The Uzima programme supports more than 200 people living with HIV and affected by AIDS in Kangemi, a slum on the outskirts of Nairobi. Part of the Development Programme of the Jesuit parish of St Joseph the Worker, Uzima services include support groups, counselling and pastoral support, income-generating activities, social assistance and help with children's schooling. Uzima also conducts awareness, seeking to reach those who are most at risk of HIV.

First encounter

Br Alain Ragueneau, Uzima Coordinator

She is 24 and has been married for two years. When she told her husband that she was pregnant, he just disappeared. Finally the young woman came to give birth in Nairobi with the support of her sister. A couple of hours before giving light to a beautiful baby, she was told she is HIV-positive. And today her sister brought her into the office of Uzima. She is devastated and cries silently. She is crying not so much for herself; she is anxious to know if her daughter is infected too. And she will have a definitive answer only in a year and half's time.

To know her status was to be pushed into an unknown country where she felt lost and discouraged. But joining the programme of Uzima is like meeting friends who have been living in that country for months and years. They know the virus exists in them but they refuse to live in their disease. Their laughter gives hope and their presence breaks the loneliness of someone who is victim of a dreadful stigma; she has got a new family. She will be taught how to walk on new paths.

How to accompany her on her path of suffering? For me, the border of her new country remains close and grazes me, sending me back to my own fragility and to my limits. How to make compassion bloom in each encounter - visitation? Compassion that makes listening respectful and open to silence, the gaze fraternal, the smile encouraging, the voice gentle when giving a message beyond words: no suffering is lost, useless, an immense chalice gathers the innocent blood. Your tears are watering fertile plains for the life of your daughter.

The young woman is referred to Lea Toto (a programme run by Nyumbani in Kibera) where they will take care of her three-day baby whatever her status might be. With careful gestures of a neophyte, she offers her a breast swollen with life and for the first time, a large smile.

This first encounter made me more human.

Being part of a discordant couple

When Father General Adolfo Nicolás SJ visited Kangemi in December 2009, he was warmly welcomed by members of Uzima who sang and danced with him. A discordant couple wrote down and shared their moving testimony, which we share with you here:

The lament of the HIV-positive partner

I don't believe that you are negative
You caused me to be infected through your carelessness
You don't love me
You don't give me enough care
You are looking for other partners out there
You don't do what I want you to do
I think I am a burden to you
I wish I died a long time ago
Don't worry, I am on my way to death, soon I will be out of your way
You don't know what I am going through
I am tired of taking the medicine

The lament of the HIV-negative partner

I think you always had this disease
I am not convinced that you got it recently
You either follow my instructions or I leave you
I am not the one who infected you; why are you hanging onto me?
I have important things to do other than to sit listening to you
If you want to die, go on and die, I am not God to heal you
You are a burden on my family
I have experienced countless blames and accusations
There were a lot of misunderstandings
Many times I wished I was not alive to go through all this
Many times I have been tempted to run away from the family
I have been stigmatized as much as my spouse
But the grace of God bound me to my family and I thank God

The advantages of being a discordant partner

I learnt to empathise with those who are infected and affected, to put myself in their place
It taught me to be patient with the sick and suffering
I came to understand that people never get infected because they are sinners and that anyone can be infected anytime if the right precautions are not taken
It humbled me to listen to all people
I learnt to serve and not to be served
It has opened the door to sharing my feelings with many who are like me
I learnt that infection can be in many ways
I learnt to love all people
It has opened the door to a great knowledge and deep understanding about the people of God
It has brought me countless blessings

The disadvantages of being a discordant partner

For a long time I struggled against the stigma
I was very much uncomfortable with the situation
I was always tired because of overworking myself
Sometimes I was so stressed that I just went to bed and cried
Many times I felt lonely and lost
People living positive don't trust those living negative
People living negative reject you; when they do welcome you they are suspicious

KENYA: KIM'S SUPUU

AJAN has supported the production of a new DVD to contribute to the prevention of HIV. The producer, Br Elias Mokuu SJ, writes:

Recent research indicates that most people in sub-Saharan Africa are aware of the causes and impact of HIV and AIDS and the preventive measures available. However, the irony, contradiction even, is that new cases of HIV and AIDS keep on being registered. This paradox has rekindled interest in research and innovative methods to stop the spread of the disease. Hence the production of the drama entitled *Conscience, Personality and HIV and AIDS: Kim's Supuu*.

Taking off from a manuscript written by young Jesuits working with AJAN, the drama explores the significance of a formed conscience in the process of decision-making. The drama draws on the Johari Window, a psychological approach to enhancing self-awareness and mutual understanding, and develops four main 'windows' (known only to self, known to self and to others, known to others but not to self, and the mysterious aspects of a person that are neither known to the self nor to others). What emerges is that decision-making is an everyday process and one must constantly be on guard so that external factors such as unemployment, environment and peer pressure do not lead to regrettable decisions.

Kim, the main character in the drama, is a successful man who has led his company to make huge profits. Gradually, perhaps unaware of his own weaknesses, he begins to flirt with women including a beautiful girl, Nina. Nina is Kim's latest *supuu* (colloquial Kenyan term for a beautiful girl). Kim's way of life appears to be easily predictable. But, as the story develops, we realize that there are many aspects of Kim we do not know. And we begin to wonder whether people are conscious that every decision in life has consequences, and why people make decisions which they know must have negative consequences. The drama ends in suspense, depicting the many unanswered questions that the characters provoke.

Professional television producers who reviewed the drama believe it is well suited for a national audience and will attract public interest. Some television stations in Kenya have shown interest in broadcasting it. Although professional audio-visual production is expensive, its outcome is unparalleled. The productions I have done so far, thanks to the constant support of AJAN, have reached many people in high schools, parishes and homes. They have been used as resource material for training too. This work would be non-existent if AJAN didn't offer support. Many thanks, too, to Misereor, for sponsoring both *Kim's Supuu* and its earlier companion piece *For Love for Life*.

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