

AJANews 100 - April-May 2011

With the publication of AJANews 100 we celebrate a milestone! In this issue, in addition to two 'regular' articles, we have decided to devote considerable space to retrospectives and reflexions on AJANews. Editorial pieces by Fr Paterne Mombé, SJ and Fr Michael Czerny, SJ, the current and former AJAN coordinators, respectively, are followed by comments from some of you, our readers. Today, as the HIV pandemic evolves in new directions, we hope that this special issue will stimulate discussion, reflexion and prayer on the many issues surrounding HIV/AIDS in Africa.

Coordinator's Message for AJANews 100: Information, Communication and Mutual Enrichment

Founder's Message for AJANews 100: News in the Truest Sense of the Word

Reflexions on AJANews from our Readers

The Ivory Coast Conflict: A Crisis for People Living with HIV/AIDS

Youth Movies for Life & for Love Against HIV

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. Saint 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.

COORDINATOR'S MESSAGE FOR AJANEWS 100: INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND MUTUAL ENRICHMENT

Fr Paterne Mombé, SJ, Coordinator of AJAN, discusses the importance of AJANews as a resource in the struggle against HIV/AIDS in Africa. As he explains, our hundredth issue coincides with 'a crucial time in the history of the AIDS pandemic'.

Sometime back in May 2008, I was busy giving peer education training to some youth at *Centre Espérance Loyola* (CEL -- Loyola Hope Centre) in Lomé, Togo, when I had an unexpected visit from the director of the minor seminary located in the same neighbourhood as CEL, a man from Canada. He was paying a visit to the seminary and he insisted that his host should take him to CEL to see the institution he had heard about through AJANews. He was, and maybe still is, one of our faithful AJANews readers.

This experience made me realize how AJANews has gathered together a group of silent, discrete but dear supporters of Jesuit AIDS initiatives. It tells us how much AJANews has contributed to building a network of friendship and solidarity around our ministries. In fact, for the past years, starting some few months after the launching of AJAN in June 2002, AJANews has been a platform for sharing experiences. It has been instrumental in making known to the world what Jesuits and their collaborators are doing to stem the spread of HIV and mitigate the impacts of AIDS in Africa. It is a real instrument of information, communication

and mutual enrichment. It encourages many Jesuits to dare to commit themselves to the battle against AIDS, learning from the experiences of others.

This hundredth issue gives us a special opportunity to hail the decision to create this platform and to pay tribute to those who made it possible. First, we wish to express our gratitude to Fr Michael Czerny, SJ, who dedicated himself to making it a reality and to ensuring its regularity and quality. Our gratitude also goes out to the team he worked with -- in a very special way we would like to thank Mrs Danielle Vella for her outstanding dedication in editing *AJANews*. We owe the success of this publication to her. And we do not forget all the companions and Jesuit collaborators who have accepted to share with us the richness of their initiatives and experiences in the battlefield against AIDS. Last, but not least, we think of the many *AJANews* readers who have encouraged us through their fidelity, constructive feedback, comments and initiatives, such as sharing *AJANews* with others in their respective networks.

AJANews 100 comes at a crucial time in the history of the AIDS pandemic, arriving just a few weeks before three key events: the Catholic Church Conference on AIDS, the 30-year anniversary of the beginning of the pandemic and the UNGASS High Level Meeting on AIDS. All these events are taking place in a context marked by declining interest in financing AIDS interventions. *AJANews* will still be there to share the continuous battle led by Jesuits and their collaborators despite the overall lack of interest in AIDS. It will continue to echo the good news of the Kingdom of God at work in the midst of this ever-challenging pandemic. It will keep telling us about the creative fidelity in the ongoing efforts to defeat AIDS and to make universal access not merely an empty concept but a reality in the lives of the still many youths and families vulnerable to, or touched by, HIV and AIDS in different parts of Africa.

We hope to continue to benefit from the same interest and attention from our readers. Maybe this turning point in the pandemic, as well as this milestone in the history of *AJANews*, is an ideal moment to engage each one of our readers in an evaluation to help us to serve better. This could help *AJANews* to become increasingly meaningful and effective in this changing context, while at the same time remaining enjoyable to its readers. May the Lord bestow on us blessings to keep up the good work and to proclaim His Good News of life and hope in the midst of the challenges of our time.

FOUNDER'S MESSAGE FOR *AJANews* 100: NEWS IN THE TRUEST SENSE OF THE WORD

Fr Michael Czerny, SJ was the first coordinator of AJAN and founder of AJANews. He is currently secretary to Peter Cardinal Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. Fr Czerny offers his perspective on the history and nature of our publication.

It is a great joy, as founding editor and publisher of this newsletter, to write for its hundredth issue. Hurrah! At the same time, God knows, it is a bit odd to be cheering about anything connected with AIDS in Africa. Anyhow, I am thinking about the name *AJANews* and about publishing a regular newsletter, which has

been well-edited, I believe, and has come out faithfully every month or so, now a hundred times in about eight-and-a-half years.

'What is new?' is probably one of the oldest questions on earth. The usual answer has always been 'novel': something new that quickly becomes old. This is novelty which titillates, like a gadget or a fashion, and briefly satisfies curiosity. Another, much deeper meaning of the word 'new' may be found in why we call the Gospel 'Good News', even though the most recent parts are two thousand years old, and many of its sources much older. Neither fashionable nor flashy, good news addresses real life, made up of situations that keep coming back in forms which are sometimes fresh but are often boring.

In the beginning, AIDS seemed like something new -- and in a few senses it was -- but it turned out to be a cluster (or a syndrome, as it is called) of problems which, though old, presented themselves in a surprising and aggressive manner.

When AJAN began, AIDS was very novel. It was frightening, and therefore exciting, like a movie. For a while, viewers were fascinated. But for reasons which are tangled up in the word 'stigma', AIDS was sinister and was meant to remain taboo. Practically from the start, Jesuits helped the afflicted to face AIDS in a Christian way, but this ministry remained pretty hidden. So, from the first issue, *AJANews* was full of news which nearly no one knew about. It was knowledge replacing ignorance; solid information displacing prejudice. Over and over again, *AJANews* has been telling how the Body of Christ, which is HIV-positive because some of its members are infected or affected, is combating AIDS with faith, hope and love. That's good news!

But enduring good news also has its challenges. It can seem to grow stale and become repetitious: 'old hat', as we say. The trick to keeping it 'good' is to keep rediscovering its connexions with ever-changing human life as it is really lived by each generation. It is thus that readers can say, '*AJANews* is always interesting,' even if it is about the 'same old' AIDS.

So, what to wish *AJANews* for its hundredth issue? On the one hand, foreseeing that AIDS will be with us for at least a century, I wish it another hundred issues, and then another and another, in order one day to reach a thousand. On the other hand, I wish that *AJANews* could go out of business as soon as possible because God's people have overcome AIDS, as they are overcoming hunger, ignorance, racism, violence and other sinful social structures. For now, it is too soon to say. So to celebrate one hundred, let us pledge to keep contributing, editing, publishing, reading and sharing *AJANews* until AIDS is no more. Amen!

REFLEXIONS ON AJANEWS FROM OUR READERS

AJANews currently has over 4,000 subscribers from all over the world. For our hundredth issue, we asked a few of you for brief reflexions about why *AJANews* is important to you. We print some of them here, and also include a small selection of feedback we have received over the years.

Comments for the hundredth issue:

'*AJANews* is a feeling-provoking e-newsletter which is likely to continue to arouse interest in all the affected and infected, and sometimes controversy, especially from some healthcare providers, since it is value-loaded, compassion-filled and awareness-arousing. It remains unique in the ocean of interests impacting sub-Saharan Africa. The hundredth edition inevitably brings us its centenarian outlook with a past, a present and a future. To the past we are grateful, to the present we say, "Congratulations," and to the future we say, "Welcome." -Fr *Fratern Masawe, SJ, former moderator of JESAM (Jesuit Superiors of Africa and Madagascar), on sabbatical in Canada*

'When I was working at UNAIDS as Senior Advisor I took the task to work with faith-based organisations (FBO's) out of respect for the global majority that has and lives in a faith. Gradually I realised that most secular organisations wanting to work with, for example, churches, did so and still do, because of what they see as the enormous outreach such organisations have. It struck me that churches and other FBO's first needed to do some in-reach: to engage within their own systems and mobilise from within before doing anything to reach out. I was amazed when the Jesuits started their African AIDS Network because the method they used was exactly what I thought should be done by all churches. *AJANews* keeps us all up to date with stories about experiences. And stories are important, because here we read the words of the involved people themselves, not the words of journalists. There are lessons to learn from the Jesuits: (1) churches and their organisations should do the same in-reach, (2) we all have something to learn from Africa, the continent with most expertise in the field of HIV and (3) the stories of real people matter more than reports on activity progress.' -*Calle Almedal, France*

'I first began reading *AJANews* when I was ministering in Indonesia. I was impressed by the wonderful work of so many Jesuits and their co-workers in ministering to people with AIDS. Many times, I took *AJANews* to prayer. I thought that *AJANews* was written with hopeful reality and always felt inspired after reading it. Since returning to Australia, I have continued to read *AJANews*. Congratulations on a hundred issues and continued blessings on each person involved in this important and challenging ministry.' -*Sr Maryrose Dennehy, fcJ, Australia*

'I have found *AJANews* to be a creative and compassionate work. The approach has been excellent and the focus on Africa life-giving. It always projects positive and human stories as well as great challenges and has a comprehensive coverage. *AJANews* is really an alternative medium and this is what we need in Church media today. It is spirituality and life in action and there is a feeling of walking together.' -*Sr Maggi Kennedy, MSOLA, Vatican Radio, Kenya*

'A thousand congratulations on the hundredth issue of *AJANews*. Each time I read the new issue with joy, praising God that so much good is done amidst all the evil and bad things we hear each day. It is always an inspiration to learn from other countries what can be done under similar circumstances. Continue the good work and do not get tired.' -*Sr Raphaela Haendler, OSB, MD, Tanzania*

'Some day, when questions will be raised as to who was instrumental in turning the tide of the AIDS scourge in Africa, my hope and prayer is that the publishers of *AJANews* will be among those cited in the annals of history. This publication continues to be an invaluable source of information, bringing wisdom, knowledge and light to many who care about ministering holistically to people with HIV. . . . Moreover, it is in *AJANews* that I read: "HIV means taking stigma seriously as the

first, long-term and most feared enemy to be fought. Stigma locks infected people in a cycle of neglect and solitude, keeping them hidden in their home or village, cutting off the path to treatment, until the disease progresses to its natural end: death." How sad -- yet true! No wonder that *AJANews* promotes the creation of networks of solidarity among people with HIV to testify to a different way of living with the disease! *AJANews* exemplifies the genius of its publishers -- namely, the ability to speak about policy issues as well as about local and mundane matters that afflict many people at the grass-roots. Therein lies the value of *AJANews*: its ability to bridge the gaps between policy-makers on the one hand and practitioners on the ground on the other. I highly recommend *AJANews* to all who care about and seek to minister to people holistically. Long live *AJANews*!' -*Dr Peter Okaalet, Senior Africa Director, MAP International, Kenya*

Comments inspired by previous issues:

'Your newsletter is certainly a means of keeping me informed of the huge question of HIV/AIDS in Africa. Thank you for this work. My sincere admiration and best wishes as you plod along in this work of information and promotion of support of victims of HIV/AIDS and their families.' -*Josephine Olagunju, SHCJ, Italy, February 2004*

'I want to thank you for the excellent newsletter -- congratulations to all your Jesuit brothers for the ministry they are extending and to you for communicating this Good News.' -*Fr Bob Vitillo, Special Advisor on HIV and AIDS, Caritas Internationalis, Switzerland, AJANews 38 (October 2004)*

'We enjoy reading *AJANews* and were encouraged. We are Franciscan Missionaries of Mary working in Accra, taking care of almost 400 people with HIV who are really poor. Thanks for the sharing.' -*Sr Annamma, Ghana, AJANews 53 (February 2007)*

'After just reading the two stories in *AJANews* 60 -- very powerful pieces, very readable, thought-provoking and very motivating -- I thought you would appreciate a word of feedback -- which is that this is a great format, telling compelling stories, with dialogue and personality. I won't be just skimming the newsletter when it arrives -- those stories really bring the message home and I look forward to more and the greater understanding they'll bring.' -*Roger Abbott, radio and television comedian (+ March 2011), Canada, AJANews 60 (October 2007)*

'Thanks for the updates on the Mexico Conference. I have found them extremely informative and helpful. I was able to get a view of what was happening at the conference that was not always available in the news media. Keep up the good work you are doing at AJAN and for the [African Jesuit] Assistancy.' -*Fr George Quickley, SJ, Provincial of the North-West Africa Jesuit Province, AJANews specials on the International AIDS Conference in Mexico (31 July-8 August 2008)*

'Beautiful newsletter with stories of young Jesuits connected with AJAN House -- surely one of the great consequences of this wonderful ministry.' -*Fr Pete Henriot, SJ, Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR), Zambia, AJANews 83 (August-September 2009)*

THE IVORY COAST CONFLICT: A CRISIS FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS

Armed conflicts and wars have been identified as one of the major factors of the spread of HIV in Africa. Another problem posed by these conflicts is that they prevent those living with HIV and AIDS from accessing the care and treatment they need. Our companion Harris Tombi, SJ shares with us how the lives of people with HIV/AIDS have been endangered by the politically motivated armed conflict in Ivory Coast. His account illustrates how an armed conflict can impact those touched by the AIDS pandemic. To the list of deplorable situations Mr Tombi evokes, one may add the unethical decision of international institutions to put an embargo on drugs and of some international organisations to halt their services in order to bring about political change.

From December 2010 up until this month of April 2011, the shadow of death has been looming over Ivory Coast. The clashes between pro-Gbagbo and pro-Ouattara forces have led to the demise of both civilians and men in uniform. In the face of this chaos, many people infected with HIV/AIDS have practically no more access to treatment. The therapeutic, psychological, nutritional and spiritual care from which the sick benefit has become impossible to deliver. Hospitals, clinics and other health facilities have been closed, pillaged or simply just destroyed.

The situation of the *Formation Sanitaire Urbain d'Anonkoua-Kouté* (FSU-COM -- Anonkoua-Kouté Urban Health Facility) in the health district of North Abobo, where I have been doing my apostolate with AIDS patients for the last three years, is an apt illustration of the desolation taking place in this country. After the entry of insurgents into the village of Anonkoua-Kouté at the beginning of March 2011, the health facility of this village, run by the Sisters of Providence, has been systematically pillaged and vandalised by these forces. The centre's pharmacy, administrative wing and its abundant reserve of antiretrovirals and other medicines for people living with HIV/AIDS have been ransacked and carried off.

There are currently more than 1,000 people that our health facility follows monthly who are deprived of medicine and are therefore doomed to a brutal death. The members of the Afoubenou support group who meet every Thursday and benefit from the medical support offered by the facility are now dispersed throughout the country, with death knocking more and more on their door. The sick have been plunged into a daily tragedy. They lack the medication necessary for their survival. Their lives are in danger due to the numerous breaks in treatment they are suffering. A cry of pain and of anguish is bursting from their hearts. It is necessary to reinvest in this health facility which has been decimated and which will have difficulty getting back on its feet without the help of men and women of goodwill.

The drama is not confined only to our health facility. With the difficult situation being experienced in Ivory Coast since the onset of the post-electoral crisis, the sick are suffering the torments of lack of access to medical treatment. And this has only worsened these last two months with the avalanche of violence in Abidjan and in the interior of the country. These difficulties have forced some populations, including those who are sick, to flee from their homes due to daily gunfire. They have left everything behind. In addition to the deaths caused by the war, there will be other deaths due to lack of care and to the growing impoverishment into which the population has been plunged. Disruptions in treatment, lack of appropriate nutrition, sub-human living conditions, insecurity, cardiovascular problems and

stress are but some of the situations which, in Ivory Coast, threaten the lives of people already rendered vulnerable by the pandemic.

YOUTH MOVIES FOR LIFE & FOR LOVE AGAINST HIV

In AJANews 98 (February 2011), we reported that a group of participants at the AJAN Workshop on HIV Prevention Among Youth had judged a screen-writing contest for youth. This month, we are pleased to offer some more information on the winners and on the process that will bring their creations to the screen.

Last year, the AJAN-sponsored contest *Youth Movies for Life & Love Against HIV* was opened to young people in Jesuit institutions across the continent. Through this contest AJAN hoped to offer the young generation in these centres of learning a chance to understand and express what the epidemic means to them in their everyday lives and for their friends, families and communities. It also gave them the chance to inform others, throughout Africa and beyond, about the need to protect themselves from HIV infection and to support those who are most directly affected.

Fifty-five entries were received by the contest deadline from a total of nine countries. The judges, who were impressed by the high overall quality of the submissions, selected twenty winners.

The first place prize went to Mr Ndaitoum Laoumaye Gustave from *Lycée-Collège Saint Charles Lwanga* in Chad. The other winners came from seven countries: six others from Chad, four from Togo, three from Burundi, three from Zimbabwe, one from Burkina Faso and one from Kenya.

The winning stories will be prepared to be made into short films by Loyola Productions, a Jesuit apostolate in Lusaka, Zambia. AJAN House staff have already translated the French scripts into English to facilitate this process. Nevertheless, the French language will be well-represented: once the screenplays are ready for production, the plan is to produce half the films in English and the other half in French. The final versions will all be dubbed or subtitled in English, French and Portuguese.

In addition to the cash prizes they have already received, the winners will each be sent five DVD copies of the films upon completion. In the meantime, they are rightly proud of their achievement. 'Great was my joy upon receiving this prize,' was the reaction of Gbandi Aïcha from Togo.

'I am proud of the prize I have won,' wrote Kpatcha Eossolessosso, also from Togo. 'It's very encouraging and has been both the start and a confirmation of new talents in this area.'

Martin Soulama of Burkina Faso echoed the theme of discovering new talents: 'I am very happy to send you this note of thanks and recognition for the prize that you have granted me. I am very happy because I wasn't expecting it. This prize invites me to no longer let my talents lie dormant. Perhaps the contest had a twofold purpose: raising awareness and allowing for the discovery of hidden talents.'

Fr Paterne Mombé, SJ: Publisher & Editor
Adam Hincks, nSJ: Consulting Editor
Danielle Vella, Ekeno Augustine Edan, SJ and Fr Thuadi Ngoma, SJ: Associate
Editors