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ADIUTOR FOR AFRICA SYNOD

The Holy Father has appointed Fr Michael Czerny SJ as an *Adiutor Secretarii Specialis* at the second Synod of Bishops for Africa to be held at the Vatican from 4 to 25 October. The Vatican's first synod on Africa was in 1994, followed in 1995 by Pope John Paul II's exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*. The synod is an *ecclesial event of fundamental importance for Africa*, a *kairos*, a moment of grace, in which God manifests his salvation. This time the theme is *The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*.

The AJAN Coordinator brings to the synod seven years of experience and insights offered by Jesuits active in AIDS ministry across Africa. The task of an *Adiutor* is to offer expert assistance and collaboration in the preparation of the synod documents and reports. *Adiutores* are to be present at plenary sessions and at the meetings of the various language groups.

The 62-page *instrumentum laboris* or working document emphasises globalisation, war and fragile political institutions. On AIDS, it underlines Church efforts in the spheres of disease prevention and the *formation of social moral behaviour*. It calls attention to the Church's dedication to the sick - Catholic hospitals and clinics treat about 25% of the world's HIV+ people and up to 50% in some African countries. The *instrumentum laboris* is at www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20090319_instrlabor-africa_en.html

The synod is an extraordinary grace for each bishop to discover the challenges of his own diocese and country in the context of the whole continent. For Fr Michael, even more, a unique chance to get to know Africa better as it really is, not the *jungle of chaos* the media too often reduce it to. And the very best thing about a synod, says a fellow Jesuit who served at an earlier one, it is a month-long opportunity to get to know the Holy Father, the African Bishops and the other participants very well.

Fr Michael begins his duties in Rome in mid-September. Augustine Ekeno SJ, the Kenyan regent at AJAN House, is acting Coordinator, while Fr Jacquineau Azetsop SJ (West African Province), visiting lecturer at Hekima College, is acting superior of St Ignatius community, which includes AJAN House and AFRICAMA House, the office and residence of the Moderator of the African Jesuit Assistency.

BURKINA FASO: HE STRETCHED OUT HIS HAND

Fr Paterne Mombé SJ, Director of the Loyola Hope Centre in Togo, recently visited two projects for people with HIV supported by the Jesuits in the capital of Burkina Faso.

Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying "Of course I want to - become clean!" (Mt 8:3). To a leper's humble plea for healing in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus' reply is a powerful illustration of his teachings, one that can guide modern-day believers in their involvement with people touched by AIDS.

He stretched out his hand and touched him. Recently, I had occasion to contemplate this gesture of Jesus in the activities of two associations launched in collaboration with the Jesuits in Ouagadougou. One is the *Association Solidarité Vie et Santé* (ASVS - Association of Solidarity, Life and Health), set up in 2000 by a nurse belonging to the Christian Life Community, a Little Sister of Jesus and the late Fr Jean-Luc Masson SJ, then Superior of the Jesuit community of Ouagadougou; the other is the *Association Bénévoles de l'Espérance* (ABE - Volunteer Hope Association), created in 2006 by a health worker in a medical centre, a sister of the *Filles de Notre-Dame du Sacré-Cœur*, and Fr Augustin Goytisolo SJ, who is in charge of the Jesuit spiritual centre of Ouagadougou.

The recently appointed Superior of the Jesuit community, Fr Jacques Fédry SJ, supports the ASVS, which is situated in Dapoya, a deprived neighbourhood of Ouagadougou. The ASVS provides a range of services for some 60 widows affected by HIV and AIDS, who do not have enough resources to look after themselves and their children properly. The association stretches out its hand and touches them through moral support in home visits, especially those who get sick and cannot go out. The association distributes food packages of rice, pasta, sardines and spirulina.

Mrs Gertrude Diarra, who is in charge of the ASVS, says the association started using spirulina, a very nutritious alga, after witnessing its impressive effect on a bedridden patient who was so severely undernourished that she nearly died. Struggling to eat because of mouth sores, she made do with imbibing spirulina powder, which demonstrated its beneficial properties in record time, to the great amazement of those who were already foreseeing her imminent death.

Although the ASVS does not provide medical services, it collaborates with specialised medical centres for antiretroviral therapy, extending support and buying prescribed medicines for destitute beneficiaries. Another aspect of intervention is covering the annual school fees for some 60 orphans whose parents died of AIDS.

He stretched out his hand and touched him, applies equally to the works of the ABE in another deprived neighbourhood called Pissy. This association reaches out mostly to people with HIV who have been rejected by their families. The vast majority are relatively young women with very limited means.

In its community centre, the ABE offers accommodation to those who have nowhere to lay their heads. Counselling and nutritional support are available. A stay at the centre is supposed to be short-term (three to six months), allowing a victim of rejection and discrimination to find somewhere to stay. But getting alternative accommodation is no easy task, and some are forced to prolong their stay at the centre.

Other services are similar to those offered by the ASVS. Healthcare is assured by the area medical centre and the association comes to the aid of its beneficiaries by covering some expenses and ensuring follow-up of treatment. Fifty orphans and abandoned children are looked after, their school fees paid, and nutritional support assured together with APIAS, an association of people living with HIV. Every week, a meal is cooked for children from the neighbourhood.

Since their activities are implemented in rented premises, both associations wish to set up stable centres where to run their services.

He stretched out his hand and touched him. This action of Jesus can be contemplated, too, in our benefactors and all those who, through their solicitude and generosity, allow us to

bring the compassionate and beneficial presence of Christ into the lives of those gripped by great suffering caused by AIDS.

With a heart full of gratitude, we consider these many, diverse manifestations of God's love at work through His children in this world marked by AIDS. We consider all this and simply say: *Thank you.*

SOUTH AFRICA: HYENA ROCKS

Fr Chris Chatteris SJ

The name sounded alluring - eMatshezimpisi or 'hyena rocks'. It is a small game reserve in Zululand. I thought a few elderly religious might take to the idea, but Sr Irmgard then invited four young people in their twenties. We were talking about the openness of a directed retreat and eight days of silence. I was by no means sure that this odd plane would fly but Sr Irmgard was quietly confident.

As it turned out, the four young people took this retreat as seriously as many a religious, perhaps more so. They confirmed an earlier observation: generous carers simply absorb the healing power of silence and the presence of God there.

These were exceptional young people, all involved in the Choose Life programme run at Maria Ratschitz Mission, which cares for people with HIV and AIDS, near Dundee. This peer-support programme gives young people the confidence to choose not to become statistics for the HIV/AIDS 'barometer'. Each of the four - Hlengiwe, Jabulani, Khethiwe and Thobile - comes frequently to the mission to lead these events. They also study and hold down jobs. We are talking of real generosity and commitment. Sr Irmgard herself runs a hospice for the kind of cases that the health system can do nothing more for. It is a ministry to the dying and often the abandoned dying.

The reserve is not far from Nkandla and the famous forest near where King Shaka is buried. We came to six chalets perched precipitously on a steep slope overlooking a deep valley with a rushing stream at the bottom, the opposite south-facing slope covered with lush natural bush. The chalets are shaped like traditional Zulu huts but are much larger and have everything a modern urban animal might need. We designated my hut for Mass and the sisters' for meals. These were miraculously produced by Sr Regelind, who had done a lot of pre-cooking before our arrival.

The retreatants prayed, kept silence, and contemplated the overwhelming natural beauty. I directed and, as with all seriously silent and prayerful groups, seemed to do the retreat with them.

LOVE THOUGHTFULLY!

Fr Michael Czerny SJ

Pope Benedict XVI opened his new encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, with these words: *To all people of good will, on integral human development in charity and truth.* So what might *Caritas in Veritate* do for a poor African woman infected with HIV? And can she help the reader of any Catholic newspaper grasp what the Holy Father is saying?

I thought of Rosanna, an abandoned mother in her twenties, HIV-positive, struggling to

get by in a Nairobi slum. *Six years down the line, she says, my family has not accepted me, not my mother or sisters or husband. I've lost jobs because I'm positive.*

She also lost an infant daughter to AIDS, but her 10-year-old son - conceived before Rosanna got infected - is negative. Jomo is a bright, healthy boy who loves drawing and soccer. His mom tries to keep healthy, too. *I want to see my son grow up.*

Rosanna does not take ARVs but, when sickness strikes, AJAN helps with hospital bills. From time to time, Catholic AIDS programmes invite Rosanna to tell groups the story of her difficult life, explaining her HIV status and encouraging young people to live well and to avoid the mistakes which lead to infection.

Rosanna is grateful for the assistance but seeks something more. *Myself, I am young, I want to have a future even if I didn't finish elementary. I want my son to be someone.* Unable to do physically demanding work, she stands little chance of finding someone to hire her. But recently she had an enterprising idea. The landlords in her slum refuse to provide water, telling abject tenants to find it for themselves. So, with AJAN's help, she bought a storage tank and a pump and set up a water business. Things are going well, and she is paying back nearly 2% a month.

I was trying to imagine what *Caritas in Veritate* might mean for Rosanna and Jomo when, as Providence would have it, she dropped in. So I gave her a four-page summary and, after an hour's careful reading, she came up with pretty clear ideas of its relevance for Jomo and herself.

1. Rosanna and Benedict XVI love life and see society much the same way. *I know the Encyclical is about the whole world, she said, but when I read the Pope's words, he is talking exactly about Kenya, even my slum. He says that the market must not become 'the place where the strong subdue the weak' but it is.* Billions of us live as neighbours to one another in our global village (slum?), yet with too little fraternal relationship. *Kenyan authorities see the poor as a problem. If you do not have a job, they try to send you back up-country. Our politicians feel supported by foreign aid and just take advantage of the poor.*

Accordingly, aid is misdirected and badly distributed; it creates dependence, generates corruption, abuses the poor and solves nothing. *Without ethics, we are in a total mess.*

2. The Pope *is thinking in the right channel*, Rosanna said, but many of us have become discouraged and, frankly, lazy. Addicted to sound-bites and ideological slogans, the local-cum-global picture seems too complicated to understand any more. Ever more resigned to a fragmented world, we just let others ('the market') decide.

By contrast, Benedict XVI seems tireless in wanting find the way forward. Without preaching yet showing us how, the Pope invites us to think clearly about (our) society and (our) economy. He shows us how to put order into our thinking, keeping things in their proper places. Social science seeks the facts and the trends, social policy implements governmental decisions about what to do, but only we (believing and thinking people) can weigh up the pros and the cons, only we can opt for the basic values and work for what is best under God for the whole human family.

For example, when Benedict XVI shows that respect for life and responsible sexuality are essential for development, Rosanna concurs. Honesty and true charity aren't born of selective or sentimental wishing; they hang on a complete picture of man which can only come from God.

In promoting development, the Christian faith does not rely on privilege or positions of power, the Pope affirms, but only on Christ. To which Rosanna adds: So I urge the Church to show us what being a Christian is all about. Isn't it loving your neighbour?

3. Do not think the Encyclical is full of grand social schemes. Throughout, the Holy Father calls for practical solutions to real problems. *Solutions need to be carefully designed to correspond to people's concrete lives, based on a prudential evaluation of each situation.* Rosanna is equally practical, coming up with the idea of selling water to better the lot of her neighbours and her little family.

The heart of the Encyclical is gift, gratitude, graciousness, gratuitousness. *Gift* and *gratuitousness* come up about three dozen times, and *graciousness* is Rosanna's word. To acknowledge the abundant gifts we receive is to be filled with gratitude. It is also the fundamental truth of our situation. So, we are creatures before we are bosses or employees; each our own person but radically related to one another; responsible, but not totally in charge. Instead of doing whatever we like, as global culture cajoles us to, without reference to humanity and God, things will get better only if we each graciously, gratuitously give our best: mind, heart, goods, time.

For Rosanna, forgiving her relatives, living for Jomo and his future, teaching youth to be responsible in the face of AIDS, leading a little support group for HIV-positive women, selling water to her neighbours - all helped prepare her to read and appreciate *Caritas in Veritate* very much.

Surely the best that she and I can offer is encouragement. Yes, really read *Caritas in Veritate* and consider it and pray over every sentence carefully. The message is in the title, *THINK! LOVE!* We must do both if Rosanna and Jomo and we are to have authentic human development.

Caritas in Veritate is easy to download from www.vatican.va/ - choose "Holy See", then "Benedict XVI" and then "Encyclicals"; or get it at your Catholic bookstore. Or click on www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/index_en.htm

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