

## **AJANews 85 - November 2009**

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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.

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### **MESSAGE OF THE SYNOD**

The second Synod of Bishops on Africa, Rome 4-25 October, had as its theme: *The Church at the Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: "You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world."*

*A Synod is not primarily a study session. Rather, it is God's initiative, calling us to listen: listen to God, to one another and to the world around us, in an atmosphere of prayer and reflection. As the 220 Synod Fathers return home, they address their Message to members of the Church and to all whose hearts God may open to listen to our words. One paragraph focuses on HIV and AIDS:*

*The Church is second to none in the fight against HIV/AIDS and the care of people infected and affected by it in Africa. The Synod thanks all those who are generously involved in this difficult apostolate of love and care. We plead for sustained support to meet the needs of many for assistance. This Synod, with the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, seriously warns that the problem cannot be overcome by the distribution of prophylactics. We appeal to all who are genuinely interested in arresting the sexual transmission of HIV to recognise the success already obtained by programmes that propose abstinence among those not yet married, and fidelity among the married. Such a course of action not only offers the best protection against the spread of this disease but is also in harmony with Christian morality. We address ourselves particularly to you, the youth. Let no one deceive you into thinking that you cannot control yourselves. Yes you can, with the grace of God. (§ 31)*

And the message concludes (§ 42): *Africa, rise up, take up your pallet, and walk! (Jn 5:8).*

The full text of the Message can be found at  
[www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/index.htm](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/index.htm)

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**SLOVAKIA: SONG FOR TOGO**

An annual fund-raising concert organised by the Slovakian Jesuit Province for the *Centre Espérance Loyola* (CEL - Loyola Hope Centre) in Togo has raised a record sum of 23,600 euro.

*Song for Togo 2009*, the fourth edition of the concert, took place on 14 June at the Jesuit Church of the Most Holy Saviour in Bratislava, the fruit of the hard work of the church choir, *Chorus Salvatoris*. This is the fifth year that the choir has held a charity concert, the fourth that the beneficiary has been the CEL. Fr Jean-Roger Ndombi SJ, Assistant to Father General for Africa, attended.

This year, the sum collected was the highest ever. Apart from donations given by the audience in the packed Church and by listeners who tuned in on radio, the Province contributed Mass collections too. *We invited the entire communities of believers from our churches and chapels in three cities - Bratislava, Trnava, Piestany - in western Slovakia to participate too*, explained the outgoing Slovak Provincial, Fr Ján Dačok SJ.

News of this generous support was warmly welcomed by the CEL, a community centre in Agoè-Nyivé on the outskirts of Lomé. A project of the West African Jesuit Province, the CEL is wholly dedicated to the struggle against AIDS.

*It is with great joy and deep gratitude that I received your email announcing the grant*, Fr Paterne Mombé SJ, CEL Director, wrote to Fr Ján. *The sum raised shows how committed you have all been to making the concert fruitful and successful.*

The funds will help the CEL tide over the global economic recession, which has left many humanitarian NGOs struggling. *During the first semester of this year, we were hit by the impact of the global financial crisis*, Fr Paterne continued. *Many of our beneficiaries persevere with the CEL, accepting to carry the burden of AIDS with patience, dignity and the hope of a better day to come. Today, this day has come through your donation.*

Earmarked for medication, food support and income-generating activities (IGAs) for AIDS-affected people, the grant is already being put to good use. In August, the CEL organised a workshop about IGAs for the *Association Saint Louis de Gonzague*, a support group run by the centre for people with HIV and their families. A second workshop was held in September, in which participants actually produced soap, dyed cloth and t-shirts. *The events were a great success: you could see the joy on the faces of the participants, especially when they saw all they had produced*, says Avelino Chico SJ, a Jesuit regent at CEL.

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## **CAR: FERTILE GROUND TO WORK**

*On 11 July 2009, Christian Abitan SJ left Bangui after two years of regency at the Catholic University Centre in Bangui. He shared the following with AJAN about his immersion in AIDS ministry:*

It was with a twinge of sadness that I left Bangui and AIDS ministry. Without having chosen to do so initially, I had to work in HIV prevention and gradually grew to love this ministry of education and compassion. Thank you to the entire AJAN team for filling the gaps, for strengthening my skills, through exchange of emails and training in Lomé,

and for the financial support.

My main mission was to restructure the *Centre d'Information, d'Éducation et d'Écoute* (CIEE - Information, Education and Listening Centre) of the University Catholic Centre and to breathe new life and spirit into the centre in line with the way of proceeding of the Society of Jesus. For this, two years of regency were clearly not enough. Still, many things were possible, thanks to the goodwill of those students who were my collaborators and the accompaniment of my local superior. Now, not only is the CIEE better integrated in the apostolate of the Society in Central African Republic, it is becoming an important facet of the same.

My greatest consolation was implementing the strategies put forward during the last formation for trainers in Lomé, a workshop in peer education for Jesuits and their co-workers held at the *Centre Espérance Loyola* from 23 to 27 March 2009. The young people surprised me pleasantly by showing great interest in values and by laying bare the pitfalls associated with awareness based on condoms. It is possible to do much. If this is how fertile the soil can be, why are we not investing ourselves more so that it will yield the maximum fruit?

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## **ZAMBIA: AIDS A HIGH PRIORITY**

AIDS remains a high priority for the Jesuit Province of Zambia-Malawi (ZAM) in a deliberate strategy to counter the trend to downplay the extent and seriousness of the pandemic in Africa.

*AIDS ministry is an integral and preferential part of the Province mission. We are giving so much importance to AIDS ministry because the pandemic is a cross-cutting issue which calls for a coordinated response, said Fr Alex Muyebe SJ, chairman of the Social Apostolate Committee (SAC) of the ZAM Province. It cannot be overemphasized that the pandemic is still a priority of the social apostolate regardless of the fact that AIDS fatigue is setting in. The SAC gives much importance to AIDS ministry as a creative effort to provide a panacea to AIDS fatigue.*

Recently, international agencies, governments, civil society and sometimes churches have no longer been treating HIV and AIDS with the same sense of urgency and importance that characterised the initial 'emergency' responses. Yet prevalence rates remain steep and, as of the end of 2008, 58% of people in need of antiretroviral therapy in low- and middle-income countries still did not have access to this treatment.

Neither is the growing sense of detachment borne out by the daily reality of millions of Africans struggling to live positively with HIV. Coupled with poverty, hunger and lack of opportunity, the disease is a huge problem they need constant, close support to deal with. This is where the Church, the Jesuits and their co-workers come in. The opportunities to intervene are plentiful in the many apostolic works implemented in Africa: in parishes, educational institutions, social centres and spirituality.

Fr Alex believes that the parish is one of the best possible settings, *a privileged place to fight HIV and AIDS and many other problems confronting society. Sometimes, we may perceive the work of the parish as just administering sacraments and celebrating the Eucharist, he says. But this is not so. In this Province, parishes are increasingly*

*becoming the focal point of the social apostolate in inculcating the spirituality of faith that does justice. Fr Nathan Miti SJ, pastor at St Mary's Parish in Matero, describes his AIDS ministry thus: Creating time for people and creating a community which contributes to the healing process.*

The ZAM Province has ten parishes, nearly all with home-based care (HBC) programmes run by volunteer caregivers, who are usually drawn from the Small Christian Communities. *Recent years have seen a shift in parish AIDS ministry from helping those infected to die honourably, to helping them to live a dignified life,* continues Fr Alex. *This explains why HBC projects in most of our parishes run parallel programmes of income-generating activities and for the education and care of orphans. This is the case in Matero, Mumbwa, Kasungu, Kasisi and Bwacha, to mention a few.*

Experience has revealed that women and children deserve priority in both care and prevention efforts: *At times women are victims of abuse which leaves them infected by AIDS. Financial independence helps women to be less vulnerable to contracting the virus. Children form the bulk of those affected by AIDS. The growing numbers of AIDS orphans is sufficient evidence.*

In April 2008, the ZAM SAC held a meeting with AJAN about the pastoral response to the pandemic, which drew Jesuits involved in parish ministry (see *AJANews* 68 - June 2008). In May 2009, a second meeting was organised in Lusaka by the SAC and AJAN, this time attended by 30 Jesuits from different stages of formation and apostolic works. They came not only from the ZAM Province but from those of Zimbabwe and Central Africa too.

Describing the 2009 meeting as *a resounding success*, Fr Alex said one positive point was the participation of more Jesuit scholastics, *mostly regents in the education apostolate, which benefited our exchange about youth work.* The inter-provincial networking was another plus, *the greatest area of growth.*

Both workshops helped to give further shape to the unique contribution that Jesuits believe they can bring to the struggle against the pandemic. Common consensus emerged that the single most significant contribution to deepen and sustain AIDS ministry is Ignatian spirituality.

Fr Alex explains: *Different aspects of Ignatian spirituality, such as finding God in all things, help those infected and affected as well as caregivers to draw strength from Christ who is ever present and journeying with them; to see God's plan of salvation evolving in our human experiences, no matter how challenging they may be; to defeat despair and look forward to another day with hope - a day in which God continues to intervene in human history.*

The SAC is working together with the Centre for Ignatian Spirituality in Lusaka to compile a collection of literature and retreat manuals that articulate relevant aspects of the Ignatian spirituality vis-à-vis the pandemic and AIDS ministry. Making this rich resource available will benefit the AIDS ministries that Jesuits are involved in.

And there are many. An overview of initiatives in the ZAM Province gives an inkling of the variety, creativity and depth of commitment. Wilfred Sumani SJ composed an album of songs about HIV and AIDS; Fr Michael J. Kelly SJ, a renowned researcher, writer and speaker, focuses on the interplay between AIDS and justice and education.

There are two Jesuits working as medical doctors and four chaplains - three at university and one in hospital - who are all indirectly or directly engaging in AIDS ministry. Canisius High School has an anti-AIDS club; Charles Lwanga College of Education integrates HIV and AIDS in the curriculum and the chaplaincy organises awareness activities. The two social development centres of the province - the Kasisi Agricultural Training Centre (KATC) and the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) - tackle AIDS as a crosscutting priority issue as they seek to combat poverty and injustice and to empower people to live in self-sufficiency and dignity.

The ZAM Province is determined to do more and to create opportunities for those involved to learn more, to share more and to be supported more. Ultimately, however, the goal remains a modest but solid one: to offer the best possible support to people with HIV, orphans and others affected by the pandemic.

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