HIV/AIDS

Sr. Tarcisia Hunhoff, SSpS

INTRODUCTION

HIV AIDS (Human Immunodeficiency Virus infection and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is a small part of a much larger issue, of a global illness, which I would like to call “Social Disintegration”. Social Disintegration on a global scale is one of the major concerns for any people in Authority. This phenomenon has spread so quickly around the world that we can only wonder and ponder on what is happening to human beings on the physical, mental and spiritual sphere of life.

As we all know, the Urban Drift in almost all developing countries challenges Governments and Church alike, as we journey as pilgrim peoples searching for a homeland. The present migration crisis in Europe shows us these pictures day by day.

The rapid increase in population growth and gender based violence are only the tip of the iceberg of a much deeper social and spiritual problem.

We have to see the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS in light of this picture

HIV entered the human species in the early 1970s and has been spreading so fast around the globe because of easy travel and the above mentioned social disintegration, the search in every human heart for a life filled with meaning as we journey as pilgrim people together.

The virus causing the HIV Infection, and if not detected and treated as far as we are able to today, will finally present itself in an illness we call the AIDS.

HIV entered Papua New Guinea in 1987. Papua New Guinea is by far the largest among the 22 Pacific Islands States and Territories, in regard to both size and population and also has a disproportionately large share of the reported HIV diagnosis of over 95% of the HIV cases.
Nevertheless, it is smaller than the epidemic of “African” proportions that many had predicted over a quarter century ago. The overall picture which we have of the epidemic is based on case reporting. As far as we know at present it is unlikely that PNG will see a radical change in the patterns of its HIV epidemic in the immediate future. It appears that the same warning signs that prompted concern in the past, including high levels of sexually transmitted infection, and high level of sexual risk behaviour and social drift are still present today.

An added factor of more recent years is the resource boom that is bringing money and mobility to many people, particularly in remote areas of the Highlands, who were previously not exposed to these factors, which are noted as generators of HIV risk.

Globally the epidemic has cost millions of lives to young and old, children and infants alike. The world has experienced the greatest ever number of children who have lost one or both parents. This alone has caused so much suffering and pain, has cost further social disintegration, because the number of orphans and children left behind to fend for themselves is very distressing. Children have been stigmatized in schools because their parents died of “AIDS”.

Stigma, fear and discrimination from family and friends, added to the suffering of thousands of people.

From a Congregational Point of view, the General Administration encouraged us to become engaged in the drama which was unfolding in front of our eyes.

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**

**What then was our response? Can we identify ourselves as” Bystanders”, “Onlookers”, as Judges, or as somebody who tried to understand what was happening?**

**How did I as SSpS “Perceive” the epidemic?**

- As a Curse from God?
- Punishment for Sins?
- How did we as missionaries understand what was happening?

**How then do we engage in this human tragedy? We need to ask ourselves:” What would Jesus do, walking in my shoes”?**

**In 2016, we celebrated the Year of Mercy. Many of us have contemplated the official picture of the Merciful Jesus, who carries the lost one on his shoulder, cheek on cheek.**

**Did you notice that the two people reflected in this drawing have only three eyes? Look at it again!**
What does it mean for each one of us? How do I perceive this for my own life, my ministry with people living with HIV/AIDS?

It is a very powerful image that challenges us.

- Am I willing and able to carry these people as Jesus did and is doing today?
- Do I go out to meet them in a wealthy suburb as well as in the dark stinky settlements, where they lie in a corner of the house on the floor or even under the house?
- Am I able to find Jesus there, am I able to touch Him and be touched by Him there and then?

Many of those people living with HIV/AIDS have been at Death’s Door, have suffered grievously rejection and stigma from closest friends and relatives. Added to this comes self-stigmatization which can be worse than family rejection. The guilt is lying heavy upon them of having infected other people or even their own wives.

However, service in the area of HIV/AIDS is not only suffering

For many of them Easter is dawning. Many, who have experienced acceptance in Counselling an Treatment Centres, receiving new Life through the precious gift of ART medication, who have their dignity and relationships restored, their physical strength improved are ready to celebrate their very personal Easter.

Celebrating Easter with them, means a lot to them and us. They are deeply aware of the chance for a new life, a life transformed through suffering. Although they live with HIV all their life, their life is being valued by themselves and their families, they are able to contribute to society and follow their occupation as before, care for their families and loved ones.

The UN has recently declared a very ambitious dream, that it will finish the epidemic by 2030. Their goal is the so called 3 x 90 which means by 2030:

- 90% of people worldwide will know their HIV status
- 90% of HIV positive people will be on treatment, which means at the same time prevention of HIV
- 90% are receiving continuous care

This is indeed a mammoth task. For countries such as Australia and other developed countries this is within their reach.

We in PNG have at present 7500 persons on active treatment within our Catholic Network.

80,000 to 100,000 people receive counselling and testing each year and many of them are visited in their homes, if they so wish. This is far off the 90% which the UN hopes for.

PNG faces difficulties in obtaining a regular, continuous supply of other HIV commodities like test kits, CD4 Count Cartridges and Viral load testing.

However we celebrate the achievements made so far and will soon add the first Palliative Care Centre in the Capital Port Moresby, for people who need

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intense care for a couple of weeks, in order to celebrate their very personal resurrection.

The Centre will be administered by SSpS and named after our Saint “Joseph Freinademetz Supportive Living Foundation”

I would like to end my reflection with some challenging words from “Pope Francis”:

Do not watch Life go by from the Balcony!

Whoever does not face challenges, whoever does not take up challenges, is not living. Your willingness and your abilities, combined with the power of the Holy Spirit who abides in each of us from the day of baptism, allow you to be more than mere spectators, they allow you to be protagonists in contemporary events.

Please do not watch life from the balcony! Mingle where the challenges are calling you to help carry life and development forward, in the struggle over human dignity, in the fight against poverty, in the battle for values, and in the many battles we encounter each day.

Homily, November 30, 2013

FROM THE SCRIPTURES

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (Jn 11: 25-26)

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. (Jn 20:1-10)

Sharing

After reading the reflection of Sr. Tarcisia and the Gospel texts, we are invited to share some resurrection stories of people living with HIV/AIDS in our country.

There is still no vaccine in the near future for the prevention of HIV infection.

For this reason we need more committed workers in the vineyard to “Perceive, Understand, and Engage” in this drama which is called HIV/AIDS.