

Responsibility in a Time of AIDS

A Workbook for Christian Communities

Edited by
**Anselm Prior OFM
and Alison Munro OP**



SACBC AIDS
Office



CATHOLIC
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Responsibility in a Time of AIDS: A Workbook for Christian Communities

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Imprimatur:

I deem this book to present no danger to the Catholic faith or morals. This approval also permits this book to be used as a textbook for imparting Catholic theology and instruction.

+ Frank Nubuasah, SVD, *Bishop of Francistown*

Given at Francistown, this 1st day of December 2003.

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This book is available from:

SACBC AIDS Office

PO Box 941

Pretoria 0001

Fax: 012 326 4309

Tel: 012 323 6458

amunro@sacbc.org.za

Cluster Publications

P.O. Box 2400

Pietermaritzburg 3200

Fax: (033) 345 9897

Tel. (033) 345 9897

cluster@futurenet.co.za

Lumko

PO Box 5058

Delmenville 1403

lumko@global.co.za

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Introduction

The Origin and Purpose of This Book

In February 2003 eighty five participants gathered at St. Augustine College in Johannesburg to discuss what theological contribution the Church could make to the whole area of HIV / AIDS. Most live in South Africa, but some came from neighbouring countries and even as far away as the USA and Europe. The basic question was: Does the Church have something to say about this tragedy which is afflicting whole populations, either directly or indirectly? The contents of the lectures – all of which were of a high standard, and some outstanding – have been published in a separate book entitled *Responsibility in a Time of AIDS: A Pastoral Response by Catholic Theologians and AIDS Activists in Southern African*. Its purpose is to share the rich resources of the Conference with a wider audience.

The conference's preparation committee had another interest: What about all those who do not have access, for one reason or another, to theological expertise? Could they not learn from the inputs and discussions of the conference participants? That is the purpose of this book. It takes the main themes which were deliberated at the conference and presents them in a workshop style. As will be explained in the next paragraph, the process enables people to work through the same themes at their own level of understanding. This will not only lead them to a deeper knowledge of the seriousness of the HIV / AIDS pandemic, but will also motivate them to apply their new learning in a practical manner. In a nutshell, the first book deals with orthodoxy, this one with orthopraxis. It is hoped that this book will be used by groups of Christians of every kind: members of Small Christian Communities, members of Sodalities, youth groups, and so on.

How to Use This Book

It is expected that each session will take several meetings to work through. We suggest that you begin with the session that is of most interest to you. Someone in the group could record the main ideas shared during the session so that when you meet again to continue the theme these notes will remind you of what you have discussed so far.

Alternatively, one theme could be taken for a whole day's workshop. If many attend such a meeting, divide them into smaller groups of about 6 – 8 members in order to facilitate group discussion. Their findings could be put on newsprint or shared orally with the whole group. If they dramatize any of the stories (see below) one of the smaller groups could do so in front of the whole assembly.

Each session is divided into five sections which form a process and which, therefore, should be discussed in sequence. The *Questions for Reflection*, which follow each section, are the core of this book. This is a *workbook*. It is designed to help groups of Christians discuss real life issues and come to practical conclusions. If group members come up with further questions, these could be discussed as well.

1. Human Need Speaks to Us

In this first section we record one or two stories. All the stories in this book are true, although names and places have been changed to respect anonymity. Read and discuss just one story, or

both of them if you wish, though take just one at a time. The purpose of these stories is to help the members of the group enter into the reality of the situation. Thus, the stories are negative; they describe people who have not been able, for one reason or another, to rise about the issue confronting them. The *Questions for Reflection* help the group members understand the issue being confronted in the story. Coming to a conclusion is not necessary here; that is left to later in the session.

If time permits, have members of the group dramatize the story in order to help them identify even more closely with the issue. They then sit in a circle and discuss the *Questions for Reflection*. The same could apply to the stories in Section 4.



2. *The Word of God Speaks to Us*

In this section two readings from Scripture are offered for reflection. All group members need to bring their Bibles to the meeting so that they can follow the text themselves. You may choose to use one or both texts, depending on the time available. Any other suitable text may also be used. If you can take the time to work through both texts you will benefit greatly. Scripture was not written to answer every specific problem we have, but it does lead us in the right direction. Thus, the more texts we reflect on, the clearer that direction becomes.

Some may wish to pause for silent reflection after the Scripture text is read. Others may wish to pick out words or phrases that speak to them, or share what the Lord has said to them personally in the reading. These methods will help you come to a deeper understanding of the text itself. The *Questions for Reflection* are intended to relate the Scripture teaching to the situation under discussion.

3. *The Teaching Church Speaks to Us*

Many Christians do not realise how concerned the Catholic Church is with social issues and the growth of all people towards their full humanity. For this reason we have included a quotation from one or more documents of the teaching Church.

In this third section a paragraph from the Church's social doctrine is presented. Because the language is often technical, and therefore difficult for some to understand immediately, you are advised to read through this section at least twice. Once again, the *Questions for Reflection* are vital. They help the participants come to grips with the message contained in the text and to relate it to the issue they are discussing.

4. *Reconstructing Our Lives*

Having worked on an issue from three different angles (human experience, scripture and Church teaching), the members of the group now need to look positively towards the future. This is the purpose of Sections 4 and 5.

In Section 4 more stories are related, this time positive in nature. They demonstrate how persons have faced the issue under discussion and have risen above what could otherwise have become a hopeless situation. The purpose of this section is to give the participants hope. They may come to see that positive action *can* be taken and that people are not mere victims of their own circumstances.

Use the same guidelines to be found above for Section 1. If an appropriate amount of time is taken to discuss the *Questions for Reflection*, the participants will already be moving towards the aim of the whole session, which is found in the final section.

5. *The Community Plans for Action*

It is not enough to discuss the issues which arise from the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in our society. Nor is it good enough to throw back on to others the responsibility for solving the problems we are facing. Our words will lack real weight unless they are accompanied, for each participant, by a livelier awareness of personal responsibility and by effective action. Each one is accountable for his/her actions and for the social situation in which one lives. For this to come about personal conversion is needed first. [See *Octogesima Adveniens*, #48]

In Section 5 a number of challenges are listed for the participants to reflect on and discuss. Do not be limited by these. Throughout the other sections possible courses of action could have arisen in the minds of participants. Discuss these as well.

The final step of the session will for participants to decide on which action(s) they are going to take. Decide who will do what, and when. Plan a follow-up meeting to evaluate how well the plans were put into practice.



Session 1

African Culture

1. Human Need Speaks to Us

Blaming Witchcraft

One morning while I was in my office Annie, a member of the Sacred Heart Sodality, came in to see me. She was very active in the parish and had a good name among the people. Through her tears she began to tell me about her niece. "She is the daughter of my brother who has found another woman in his life. I took her in and have been looking after her for quite some years. In fact, she is like a daughter to me." The woman continued by explaining that her niece had just died. "It was from AIDS, though we tried not to tell anyone the true cause of her death. We were so ashamed. I feel as though I am guilty. She was like my daughter and I never knew she was indulging in risky behaviour. Although he did not care for her, I feel I have let down my brother."

What has made matters worse is that Annie's brother has now accused her of having used witchcraft against his daughter. "I was shocked to hear this accusation and I asked him how he came to that conclusion." "I went to a diviner," he replied, "and he told me that you had bewitched my daughter. He told me that in a dream he saw you giving something to her to eat. She ate it and died. I know you are guilty."

"What do you think is really going on?" I asked Annie. She maintained that all along her brother had been jealous of everything she had done for his daughter, and how she treated her like her own child. Now, perhaps, he was feeling guilty, especially as he did not come near her while she was sick. "Why can we not accept the truth?" she wailed. "Why must we in Africa always blame someone else for death?"

Questions for Reflection

1. How do you think the niece felt as she lay dying in her aunt's house?
2. Why do you think Annie cared for her niece as she did?
3. What do you think of her brother's behaviour now?
4. Do you agree that in Africa we must "always blame someone else for death"? Why?

Traditional Remedies versus Modern Medicine

There was a young woman, Anna, who lived in an urban area. She was a member of a support group for those suffering from HIV / AIDS and other terminal illnesses. She was quite open about her HIV status and wanted others suffering from the same illness to accept their situation and, like her, do something about it. With the support of others, as well as anti-retrovirals, they could live fairly healthy lives, hold down a job if they had one, and contribute to helping others. Anna, then, was well cared for in the township, looked after her own health and worked hard to support others.

Anna's parents were brought up in a rural area and still lived there. When their daughter visited them she always became quite sick. Although she needed to take her medication, her parents would not let her. Indeed, they threw them away. Instead, they subjected her to enemas and other traditional medicines. "These," they said, "are what will cure whatever ails you." They would only believe in African medicines and traditional remedies.

Each time Anna returned to the township she was in a very bad condition. It always took her a long time to recover some of her original health and energy. Slowly, after many visits to her parents, she became very sick and eventually died.

Questions for Reflection

1. What do you think of the behaviour of Anna's parents?
2. Are Anna's parents responsible for her death? Why? / Why not?
3. What do you think of the conflict of interest between modern medicine and traditional remedies?

2. The Word of God Speaks to Us



Matthew 18: 23-35 *How often must I forgive?*

Questions for Reflection

1. What is the difference in attitude between the king and the unforgiving servant?
2. What does this story teach us about the conflict between traditional and modern medication?



James 2: 14-23 Faith and good works

Questions for Reflection

1. What is the result of having faith but no deeds to express it?
2. What concrete action could be taken to preserve the values of African culture, while making use of modern medicines?

3. The Teaching Church Speaks to Us

Particular attention should be paid to our customs and traditions in so far as they constitute our cultural heritage. They belong to oral cultures and their survival depends essentially on the dialogue of generations to ensure their transmission. Corporate personalities, wise thinkers who are its guarantors, will be our principal interlocutors in this profound change in our cultures. A dialogue with the guarantors of our cultural values and of our traditional religion (African Traditional Religion) structured around the cultural heritage is strongly recommended in our local churches.

African Synod 1994, # 21

Questions for Reflection

1. Why ought we pay particular attention to our customs and traditions?
2. How could the dialogue recommended above help us in this issue of African culture and modern medication?

4. Reconstructing Our Lives

From Abuse to Life-Giver

Thembi, a 13-year-old girl, was living on a farm. The farmer regularly abused her sexually and eventually she fell pregnant. Her family took her to a doctor who performed an abortion against her will. He also sterilized her without her knowing about it. Returning to the farm, she was repeatedly abused by the same farmer. Fed up with this treatment, she decided to leave this terrible situation where even her family did not defend her out of fear of the farmer. She went to live on the streets in town. She came to know a much older man who showed her some sympathy. Just to have a shelter and some security, she agreed to



marry him. Not long afterwards he died and she found herself back on the streets again.

Thembi spent her life in and out of school, on and off the streets. Then she began to notice other children in the same condition. "What am I going to do with my life?" she wondered. She began to gather these children together and eventually approached a man who worked at the railway station. "We do not have a home and there are many of us, including young children." He gave her a place to stay. Later Thembi learned that she was HIV positive and the rumours about her status spread. A senior member of the church told her: "You and this crowd need not come to church; we will conduct a service at your place." After two visits no one bothered to come again. Thembi now has 47 children in her care. They are quite cramped together, but at least they feel it is their home. One of her "children" has now graduated from law school and another is a social worker. Some are disabled and others are HIV positive. Thembi carries on being "mother" to them all.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why was the farmer able to abuse Thembi and get away with it?
2. What do you think led Thembi to ask: "What am I going to do with my life?"
3. Thembi seems content with her present life? Could it be improved? If so, how?

A Reaction to Rape

Thabo had worked very hard in his life. Now he was living well with his wife and only child, a daughter named Nono. Sitting in his fine office one day, he received a frantic call from his wife. "Come home now! Come Quickly!" she cried. "Why?" he asked, "What is wrong?" "Just come, you are needed here now!" was the reply. Upon arriving home he heard that his ten year old daughter had been raped. At first she had been afraid to tell her parents, but now the truth came out as she and her mother talked together about sex and responsibility. Immediately Thabo demanded to know: "Who did this to her?" In a shaking voice his wife replied: "The son of the woman who used to work with us."

Thabo could not come to terms with the tragedy and so, together with his wife, sought help by joining a support group. During one of the sessions he pleaded with the others: "I don't know what to do. Please help me!" He went on: "I don't want your prayers. If you want to pray, go into your rooms to pray but I don't want your patronizing prayers. I want to know how to restore my daughter's dignity."

But the news was to get worse. Thabo and Maria had taken Nono to the doctor. The report came back that their child was HIV positive. "I am going to kill that man!" roared Thabo. "I'm going to make him pay for what he has done!" The doctor tried to persuade the couple to go and speak with the man, but Thabo only shouted louder: "I don't want to talk to him, I want to kill him!" Later the facilitator of the support group called to see how Thabo and the family were doing. Thabo said: "You won't believe this, but somehow I received the strength to talk to the rapist. He says he will face the consequences of his crime. Meanwhile, our child has been treated and seems okay for the moment.... We are hoping it will stay that way. In fact, this whole episode has brought us all more closely together as a family."

Questions for Reflection

1. What do you think of Thabo's immediate reaction to what happened to Nono?
2. Why was the support group so important for the family?

5. The Community Plans for Action

1. What could be done to organize visits to families in need?
2. How could parents be helped to take responsibility for teaching their children about human sexuality?
3. Make a plan to encourage families to pray together, share a meal and do things together.
4. Invite those who are interested to gather and discuss how to re-establish the traditional values of the culture.
5. Who could set up a programme to teach about the various types of cultures, and a knowledge and appreciation of the ancestors?



Session 2

Working in Support of Others

1. Human Need Speaks to Us

The Quest for a Child Support Grant

Sipho is a young child in a squatter settlement. His mother is a refugee from Rwanda and his father has died of AIDS. Sipho himself was born in South Africa but, because they are poor, they have no money for transport to go to the nearest town to register the birth. His mother is unemployed and she needs to access a child support grant in order to care for Sipho adequately. Because there is no registration of his birth, he has no Identity Document. Thus, when Sipho's mother applied for the grant she was rudely told by the official in the office that she did not qualify.

Some of the parishioners were very upset when they heard the story and decided to advocate for the child. A delegation of them went to the Home Affairs office. They queued for many hours. Eventually they met an official and politely explained the situation. "This child," they said, "is a South African citizen. His mother is in desperate need of help to nurture him and bring up a healthy boy. The law says that she can receive a grant for the child." The official, however, refused to listen to them. Indeed, he told them to mind their own business and get out of the office. They tried to argue with him but the official would not listen. He just sat there chatting away with a co-worker in the local language. He would not even give the parishioners a form to fill in.

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you know of a similar story? What was the result?
2. What chance has Sipho of growing up as a normal child?
3. How do you regard the behaviour of the government official? What could be done about it?

Reporting to the Police

Nomsa and Patrick, both 15 years of age, were good friends and often spent time together chatting. One day they were alone in her house after school. They were sitting next to each other on the sofa and after a while they began to start kissing. Patrick became sexually aroused and started fumbling with Nomsa's dress. "What are you doing?" cried Nomsa alarmed. "Let's go the whole way," suggested Patrick. "We are such good friends, it's time we expressed it properly." "No way!" moaned Nomsa. "We cannot behave like that at our age." But Patrick went on insisting that they have sex and, although Nomsa resisted him, he forced himself on her and she was not able to escape. That night Nomsa told her sister what had happened. "I've heard on the radio," her sister told her, "that if such a thing happens we should immediately report it to the police." They decided that this is what they would do.

The next morning Nomsa and her sister went to the police station. The policeman asked Nomsa to explain everything that had happened right there in front of the other people waiting in the queue. When she tried to speak quietly he told her to speak up. He then had them sit and wait. It was two hours later before another policeman called them into a smaller room and asked Nomsa to go over the whole incident again in great detail. Then he demanded: "And what did you do to provoke this young man? Don't you realise that once a man is aroused he cannot stop?" After about 20 minutes of questioning Nomsa was told to go home and forget the whole thing. She and her sister left the police station in tears. She didn't tell anyone else and avoided Patrick at school. Meanwhile, because the police had taken no action, no one visited Nomsa or referred her for counselling. Nor were any tests done by a social worker.

Questions for Reflection

1. What do you think of Patrick's behaviour?
2. Did Nomsa "provoke this young man" to have sex?
Why do you think so?
3. How do you regard the behaviour of the police?
What could be done about it?

2. The Word of God Speaks to Us



Isaiah 61: 1-3

God's people are re-assured

Questions for Reflection

1. Discuss what you understand by:
 - ♦ “to bring good tidings to the afflicted”
 - ♦ “proclaim liberty to captives”
 - ♦ “the opening of the prison”
 - ♦ “to comfort all who mourn”
 - ♦ “to give them a garland instead of ashes”.
2. What does this reading say to you about supporting those who suffer from HIV / AIDS?
3. What obligations towards the young does this reading impose on communities?



James 2: 14-24

Faith expressed by action

Questions for Reflection

1. Sum up in your own words the main teaching in this Scripture text.
2. What does this say about the lives of young people today?
3. What can the Christian community learn from these words in terms of helping those who are liable to contract HIV / AIDS?

3. The Teaching Church Speaks to Us

It is to all Christians that we address a fresh and insistent call to action. In our letter on the development of peoples we urged that all should set themselves to the task: “Laypeople should take up as their own proper task the renewal of the temporal order. If the role of the hierarchy is to teach and to interpret authentically the norms of morality to be followed in this matter, it belongs to the laity, without waiting passively for orders and directives, to take the initiative freely and to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws and structures of the community in which they live.”

Let all examine themselves to see what they have done up to now, and what they ought to do. It is not enough to recall principles, state intentions, point to crying injustices, and utter prophetic denunciations; these words will lack real weight unless they are accompanied for each individual by a livelier awareness of personal responsibility and by effective action. It is too easy to throw back on others the responsibility for injustices, if at the same time one does not realise how each one shares in it personally, and how personal conversion is needed first.

This basic humility will rid action of all inflexibility and sectarianism; it will also avoid discouragement in the face of a task which seems limitless in size.

Octogesima Adveniens, #48

Questions for Reflection

1. Discuss what you understand by:
 - ♦ “each share in [responsibility] personally”
 - ♦ “personal conversion is needed first”.
2. What has this text to teach us about the community’s responsibility for those who are vulnerable?

4. Reconstructing Our Lives

“People Against Abuse”

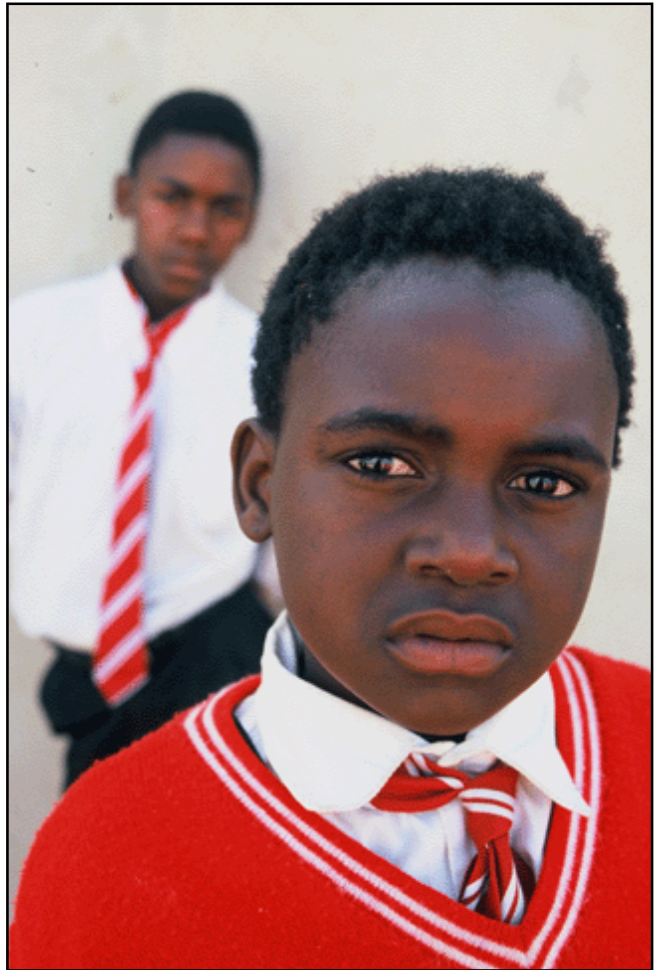
A few people who lived near each other in the North West Province became aware, through contact with the local clinic, of the enormous problem of rape, as well as other forms of abuse in their vicinity, for example, sexual, verbal and physical abuse. They encouraged others to join them and they formed a group called “People Against Abuse”. The members of the group went to the local police station and discussed the matter with the station commander. They negotiated with him to set up a desk in the police station to deal with these matters. When people came in to report rape and sexual, verbal, or physical abuse, they were automatically referred to the group “People Against Abuse”. The victims received counselling and referrals to health services. They were also assisted in making police reports, visiting the district surgeon and the courts. The group was also responsible for setting up a safe haven which had four beds and a support staff. These are also located at the police station for those who cannot return home safely.

Questions for Reflection

1. What difference did “People Against Abuse” make to the lives of people in their community?
2. What do you think of the response of the Police Station Commander?
3. Do you know of a similar story of support for abused people? Share it with your group.

Supporting Those Unable to Help Themselves

A parish Social Justice Group became aware that a large number of children with AIDS, many of whom were orphans, were unable to obtain even the minimum of food they needed. Grannies caring for them were too poor to help much. Also, many of them had no proper documents and therefore were unable to obtain their old age pensions. The parish Social Justice Group decided to identify those families in which at least one member had HIV / AIDS and which were eligible for child support grants, pensions and disability grants. They then gathered the proper forms, assisted the people to fill in the forms, accompanied them to the proper government office - either Home Affairs or the Department of Social Development - and monitored the response of the office staff until people secured their documents and grants which were rightly due to them.



Questions for Reflection

1. What difference did the parish Social Justice Group make to the lives of people in their community?
2. What kind of skills are needed to take on this kind of assistance?
3. Do you know of a similar story? Relate it to the others.

5. The Community Plans for Action

1. Form a parish group to advocate for children, especially those suffering from HIV / AIDS, and orphans:
 - Register children for child grants, the elderly for pensions, and AIDS sufferers for disability grants. This may first mean helping them get ID documents, birth certificates, etc.
 - Advocate for children to get into school, especially orphans and those without fees, uniforms, books, etc.
 - Accompany a child to school to register on the first day.
 - Put pressure on local education office personnel if a child is excluded.
2. Advocate for food products from the Department of Social Development for orphans and grannies who are caring for orphans.
3. Accompany children aged 1-7 to local clinics for free health care.
4. Educate women and children to their rights in the Constitution.
5. Establish a legal aid or information centre in your parish to assist the poor and vulnerable.
6. Get yourselves recognized by government departments as a group advocating for the rights of the poor.
7. Advocate for the relevant government department to provide feeding schemes for poor public schools
8. Develop a way to memorialize those who have died of AIDS, for example:
 - Construct a shrine where people can write letters to the deceased.
 - Organise Holy Hours of prayer for sufferers and their families.
 - Make an AIDS quilt with a square for each person who has died.
9. What other suggestions can your group come up with?

Session 3

The Media

1. Human Need Speaks to Us

John and Sex

Seventeen year-old John is walking along a very busy street. In his pocket he has a condom which a friend has given him. He glances up and sees a provocative poster of a couple in a close embrace. A bubble on the left of the poster reads: "Should we, or shouldn't we, make love?"

John goes home, his head filled with ideas. He feels brave enough to want to talk to his father about sex. But his father fobs him off with some excuse. The next day John goes to school and during the sex education class he is told: "If you are going to have sex, use a condom."

Still confused, John, who is an altar server, speaks to the parish priest who tells him to wait until he's married before he has sex. That evening John meets his girlfriend Suzy. She is HIV positive, although she hasn't told him. He asks her to sleep with him, thinking: "It's my life. I'll do what I want to. Anyway, everyone else is doing it - and I do have a condom...."

Questions for Reflection

1. What is your reaction to the poster John saw in the street?
2. Why do you think John's father would not talk to him about sex?
3. How do you think John eventually solved the confusion he felt? What would you do in John's situation?

Sex Now or Later?

Tom and Nomsa had been sleeping with each other for quite a while. One day Tom read an advertisement in a Catholic newspaper. It invited young people to attend a *Behavioral Change Programme*. He wasn't sure why, but he felt a desire to attend. He shared the advert with a teacher at school who organised the whole class to attend.

The presenters of the workshop emphasised the positive side of sex and how physical sexual activity is designed for a couple who have committed themselves to each other for life. Tom felt this was the message he needed to hear, but wondered what Nomsa would say if he shared his intentions with her. "Will she laugh at me?" he wondered. "Will she tell me I'm no longer a man?" On returning home he plucked up courage one day to share his feelings with her. To his surprise, she told him that she had been feeling the same way for some time.

The two of them talked together for a long time and discovered that they agreed on many issues. Nomsa, for example, felt that having sex had just become a habit and she was no longer enjoying it. Tom told her: "I felt it was something that we ought to do; you would expect it of me, although it was never really fulfilling for me." The problem, they discovered, was that they had been planning all their meetings so that they could sleep together. They hardly ever spent time talking to each other and coming to know each other as persons. They had also felt pressure from some of their peers who seemed to expect young people to engage in sexual activity.

Today Tom and Nomsa meet regularly, usually in the company of friends who share their outlook on life. Sometimes they enjoy a picnic where they sing and tell stories, or go and see a movie. At other times they saunter through a large shopping mall, marveling at all they see in the shops, and enjoying the noise and bustle of the crowds of people. Often they end up having a coffee or an ice cream together.

Life has never been so enjoyable for Tom and Nomsa. They are discovering each other in a new and wholesome way. They hope that one day they'll get married and that having sex will be one part of a much broader and fulfilling life together. Every now and again, when the two of them are holding hands, Tom looks into Nomsa's dazzling brown eyes and says to himself: "Thank God for that newspaper advert!"

Questions for Reflection

1. Tom and Nomsa felt pressure from some of their peers to engage in sex. Do you know if this is a common experience? How difficult is it to overcome such pressure?
2. What do you think of Tom's and Nomsa's decision?
3. Make your own list of activities that young people, who don't want sex, can do together to enjoy themselves.

2. The Word of God Speaks to Us



Exodus 2: 23-25 *Siding with the oppressed*

Questions for Reflection

1. "God heard their groaning."
Who today listens to those suffering from HIV / AIDS?
2. What could your community do about the confused messages given to the youth in the media?



Luke 10: 25-37 *The good Samaritan saves the life of a victim*

Questions for Reflection

1. How did Jews usually treat Samaritans?
Why did this Samaritan care for the Jewish victim?
2. Who is *your* neighbour?
3. What does this story tell us about people suffering from HIV / AIDS?



3. The Teaching Church Speaks to Us

Our century is characterized by the mass media or means of social communication, and the first proclamation, catechesis or the further deepening of faith cannot do without these means.

When they are put at the service of the Gospel, they are capable of increasing almost indefinitely the area in which the Word of God is heard; they enable the Good News to reach millions of people. The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect. It is through them that she proclaims “from the housetops” the message of which she is the depositary. In them she finds a modern and effective version of the pulpit. Thanks to them she succeeds in speaking to the multitudes.

Nevertheless, the use of the means of social communication for evangelisation presents a challenge: through them the evangelical message should reach vast numbers of people, but with the capacity of piercing the consciences of each individual, of implanting itself in one’s heart as though one were the only person being addressed, with all one’s most individual and personal qualities, and evoke an entirely personal adherence and commitment.

Evangelii Nuntiandi, #45

Questions for Reflection

1. What words does the pope use to show his appreciation for the media?
2. What is the challenge the pope puts to the use of the media?
3. How could the media be better used in the area of HIV / AIDS?

4. Reconstructing Our Lives

Agnes’ Response to HIV

Agnes, at 41 years of age, has been HIV positive for 9 years. It was her husband who had infected her. He died five years ago of pneumonia, brought on by AIDS. Agnes, a devout Catholic, had nobody to talk to about her condition. She was too scared that she would be ostracized by her community. Eventually, she turned to Sr. Maria who was active in the parish. From Sr. Maria, Agnes learned that she was not the only infected person in her parish. “Why don’t some of you come together?” suggested Sr. Maria. One afternoon a group of them, all women, met for tea and a chat.

At first everyone was nervous, but after a while the women found that they had a shared interest in needlecraft, a very strong talking point among them. This encouraged them to discuss their common sickness. They slowly became friends and strong supporters of one another.

One day Agnes had a suggestion. "Why don't we start producing quilts, knitwear, embroidery and various other forms of needlecraft? If we worked together, we might be able to find buyers." Sr. Maria got in touch with Mrs. Levy, the woman who manages the local craft market and she was delighted to have the women sell their work there. Many foreign tourists pass through the craft market and they love the needlecraft which is usually on display there and which they are happy to purchase.

Now, a few years later, Agnes has not been seriously ill for some time - in fact, she feels so well, she takes a long brisk walk in her township every day at dusk. What's more, today she sold a patchwork quilt to a very pleasant American woman who offered to sell her needlework at her shop back in the United States. Agnes, as well as her friends, feels they have everything to live for.

Questions for Reflection

1. How does Agnes' story compare with that of John?
2. What helped Agnes and her friends to rise above worrying about their sickness?
3. How would you describe Sr. Maria's role?

Sipho and Sex

Sipho had been sleeping with his girlfriend for some time. Then they broke up their relationship and he began to keep to himself for a while. He didn't find another partner and even began to realise that he didn't need sex really. He made some new friends, both men and women. He enjoyed their company and felt content with life.

One day he picked up a newspaper and found the supplement "Thetha Nathi" ("Speak to Us") inside. On the cover was a photo of a man and woman embracing. The man was clearly naked from the waist up. The woman didn't seem to have much on either. "I wonder if there's any clothing on below", mused Sipho. Then, as he read through the text and looked at the pictures, he began to feel sexually aroused. "They're telling me that a condom makes it all OK," he thought. "They're all having it and obviously enjoying it too!"

By the time he finished looking through the pages Sipho felt an urge to have sex. "Where can I get it, though? I have no girlfriend and I don't want to force myself on anyone." He knew where the sex workers hang out and, going there, he chose one and had sex with her. After that experience he began to visit her on a regular basis. "It's OK," he convinced himself. "It's just to release my frustration." A couple of years later he discovered he was HIV positive. In his fear and anger he shouted aloud: "That damn newspaper supplement!"

Questions for Reflection

1. Why did Sipho, do you think, feel content with life after losing his girlfriend?
2. Describe how you *see* Sipho's future unfolding.
3. List some of the presentations in the media (movies, magazines, books, etc) that lead young people to seek out sexual experiences.

5. The Community Plans for Action

1. Discuss the current issue of Catholic newspapers (Diocesan News, Southern Cross, etc), magazines (Trefoil, Challenge, etc) in catechism classes, youth groups, sodalities etc.
 - What have you learned from these sessions?
 - How can you organise meetings to discuss some of these issues?
2. What could you do to improve communication in your parish about the issue of HIV / AIDS and the media?
3. What projects do you know of which could be put to work in your parish?
4. Are there people in your parish involved in something that really works?
 - Share this by contacting editors of the Catholic media?
5. What is the difference between the information we as Church are offering and that being told by commercial media?
6. Listen to *Radio Veritas* on shortwave 3.23 MHz from 6-9pm daily and from 12 noon-1pm on 7.24MHz for a dose of the Good News that we do not get enough of on TV and radio in South Africa.
7. What other suggestions can your group come up with?

Session 4

Prevention

1. Human Need Speaks to Us

Sally and Sex Education

Sally had always had a good relationship with her mother who was ready to speak to her daughter of sexual issues in a way appropriate to her age. It had begun when Sally was merely five years of age. Always open with her mother, Sally had told her about some sexual play with a seven-year-old boy. This was the first opportunity for education in sexual matters. This open approach continued as Sally was growing up.

At the age of fifteen Sally became aware of her father's behaviour. He was a taxi driver and would use his taxi to pick up women with whom he spent time at a bar and later for sex. Having learned of the dangers of HIV / AIDS, she expressed her concern to her mother: "Are you going to get AIDS and die?"

It was about a year later, when Sally was then sixteen years of age, that she had a romantic attachment to a twenty five year old taxi-driver. Sally's mother pleaded with her not to get involved sexually. "But if you do, at least use a condom." The relationship ended and Sally met a young man of her own age group and, as their friendship developed, they agreed to be tested for HIV. Sally proved to be HIV positive while the young man was HIV negative.

Sally told her mother and family. She needed support as she had been told that her life expectancy was five years. Her mother asked her: "How could this have happened? You knew all about the dangers of sexual behaviour. You also knew about the need to protect yourself from this terrible disease." Sally had to admit that they had had sex without a condom. "But, why?" her mother asked desperately, "Was it your boyfriend who had insisted?" "No, mum, it was not him. In fact, he had wanted to use a condom. I didn't want him to as I wanted to experience sex 'flesh on flesh'." Sally and her young man are now both HIV positive. Their only consolation is that their young child was born HIV negative.

Questions for Reflection

1. What do you think of Sally's mother's attitude to sex and sex education?
2. Despite what she knew, Sally ended up with HIV. Why?
3. What is the best way to teach adolescents about the dangers of promiscuous sexual behaviour?

What can Anna Do?

Anna, a middle-aged woman from one of the nearby parishes came to Sister Mary to seek her support. "My husband," she told Sister, "is the only sexual partner I have ever had. Yet he seems to have lots of girl friends. He goes to the bar most evenings and sometimes stays out half the night. I know he goes out with other women but I can't say a thing. When he comes home from the bar, often drunk, he sometimes beats me and frequently rapes me, especially if I refuse to have sex with him. I fear he might have become infected from these other women. Now people are talking about AIDS and I'm terrified. But there is nothing I can do. Once I asked my husband to use a condom but he just beat me all the more."

One day, in despair, Anna went to her priest and asked him to help her. Maybe he would talk to her husband and explain the dangers. Maybe he could stop the beatings. Maybe he would even talk to her husband about how using a condom might be wise? The priest just shook his head and told her to go home and accept her cross! Sister Mary was horrified, so at a diocesan conference she told this story. The bishop stood up and wagged his finger at Sister and told her to tell the woman she must risk her life, make that sacrifice and submit to her husband!

Anna had no way out. It was obvious that she would get no support from her Church. She had no money and no means of surviving independently of her husband. Sister Mary, bogged down by her powerlessness in this and many similar stories, had to leave her parish duties some months afterwards.

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you know of people in a similar situation to that of Anna? Talk about them (without using their names).
2. What, for you, is the way forward for Anna?
3. Where does Sister Mary's "powerlessness" come from? Have you experienced this yourself? How?

2. The Word of God Speaks to Us



Proverbs 7: 6-27

The necessity of correct guidance and education

Questions for Reflection

Reflect in silence for a few minutes on the following phrases, then discuss the questions which follow:

- ♦ “He follows her as an ox goes to the slaughter”
 - ♦ “He does not know that it will cost him his life.”
 - ♦ “So many victims have been laid low.”
1. How does the young man stray from the right path?
 2. Why do men / women stray into the path of death today?
 3. Where can they turn for correct guidance and education?



Romans 7: 14-25

The limitations one feels in facing a problem

Questions for Reflection

“I cannot understand my own behaviour.” St. Paul feels frustrated and powerless to do the good he wants to do.

1. What reason does he give for this powerlessness?
2. How can he escape from this?
3. How can we respond to a feeling of powerlessness in pastoral situations?

3. The Teaching Church Speaks to Us

The threat to the human race posed by AIDS is so serious that there is a grave duty on the part of organisations and individuals to prevent its spread. And here are two areas of particular importance: The first is the dissemination of information and the second is acting in a responsible way with regard to sexual activity.

Organisations, particularly the State, have an obligation to disseminate information about AIDS, the size of the problem and its prevention. Individuals, in their turn, have a duty to become well informed, for wilful ignorance about so serious a matter is sinful.

Certain medical authorities and governments advocate using the condom as a preventative against the spread of AIDS. However, condoms are not always reliable. If a person persists in sexual promiscuity, he or she will still be at great risk of contracting AIDS. Furthermore, if an attitude prevails that when using a condom sex is safe, then the condom message can increase rather than decrease the incidence of AIDS.

Any person who has contracted AIDS should take very seriously the responsibility of preventing further spread of the disease. This will call for great consideration of others, which will often have to be shown by taking great care and exercising restraint.

It has already been noted by others that an important way to ensure one neither contracts nor spreads AIDS is for two sexual partners to remain faithful to one another. The risk of AIDS, therefore, places a further moral obligation on people to be sexually faithful to each other. For such unfaithfulness is not only a sexual sin against one's partner but also a sin of putting his or her life at risk. Mutual sexual fidelity eliminates a major source of AIDS transmission.

SACBC 1990

Questions for Reflection

1. How much do you know about what AIDS is, how it is contracted and how it can be prevented?
2. Where could you turn to for more information? Make a plan to do this now.
3. Many young people have changed to safer behaviour. In what ways can you support each other in living according to the Church's moral teaching?

4. Reconstructing Our Lives

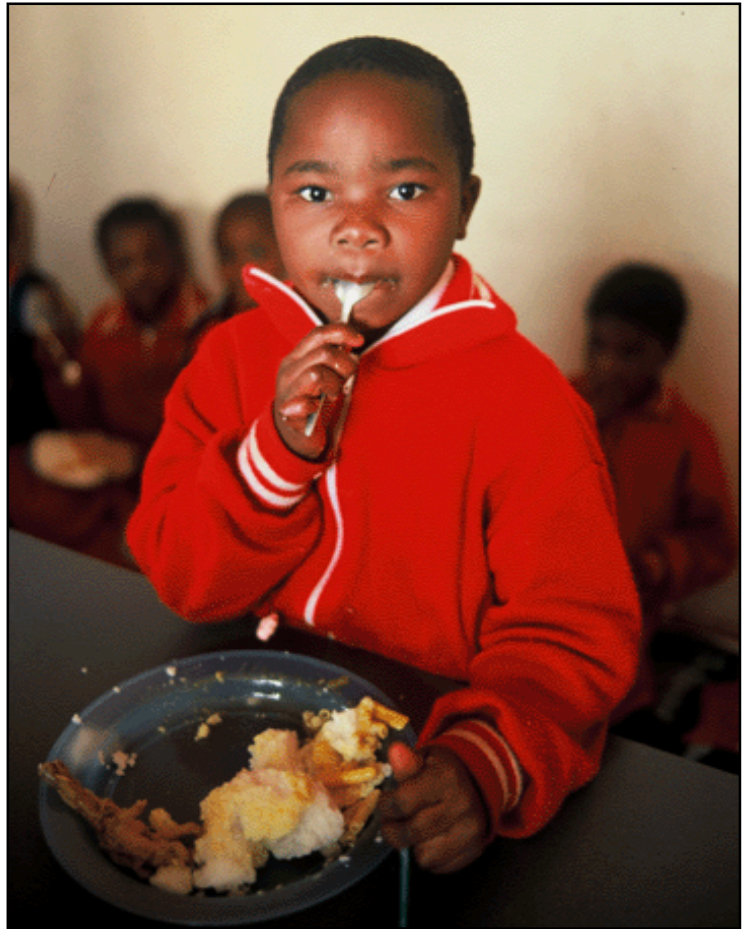
A Behavioural Change Programme

Joyce and Tabiso were just two of more than fifty pupils in Grade 11 who attended a teenage behavioural change programme. In order to help promote and pay for the course a video was going to be made of all the discussions. The participants were asked to carry on as if the camera were not there. This was very hard at the beginning but by the second day the course was so interesting that the camera and the operator, Siphon, were no longer noticed by them. Like the others, Joyce and Tabiso listened to the talks, answered the questionnaires among themselves, watched videos, played games, made up sketches and asked questions. They soon discovered that they were not so well informed about sexual matters as they had thought they were. They felt that the whole programme was challenging them to eventually make their own choices in life.

Siphon was a good camera-man, skilled at a job he thoroughly enjoyed. He was always ready to explain the finer points of what he was doing. During the five days he gradually became quieter. An observer might have thought that he was concentrating on the work at hand. But later he spoke to one of the teaching team. He said: "What is happening here among these adolescents is getting to

me. I now realise that my own life is lacking in responsibility. I will never be the same after this."

In his evaluation Tabiso commented that it had been the first time in his life that he had been able to ask an adult any question he liked about sex and get an honest answer. Joyce really enjoyed the whole course. She had got to know her classmates in a much deeper way and was happy with the new responsibility they felt for one another. At the end of the course she was sorry to be leaving; yet she went home with a new enthusiasm which she soon transmitted to her mother. Together they looked at all the handouts and questionnaires. They went



through the different answers that had been given. Joyce's mother was amazed at the boundaries her daughter was setting for herself and how much she was now sharing with her. They had never talked so intimately and without embarrassment about sexuality before. She just had to write immediately to thank the organisers of the course. "I have been telling Joyce for so long about what she must avoid," she wrote. "But now Joyce is doing this for herself! Thank you very much!"

The educators at the school from which these teen-agers came are now enthusiastic about its effect. They claim that the school is a different place. There is such a noticeable increase in responsibility among the learners.

Questions for Reflection

1. In what way did Joyce express the new sense of responsibility she had learned?
2. What, do you think, made Sipho reflect on his own life choices?
3. What connection do you see between responsibility in sexual matters and responsibility for one's life in general?

Teenagers Responding to the Challenge

Mary, a nurse and midwife, started a sexual education programme which has now spread throughout the Congo. Ordinary people are trained to teach all age groups, both children and adults, in their own community setting. These trainers observed that, after this course had been conducted in many places over the past five years, there has been an improvement in community health. There is less venereal disease among the young and fewer child pregnancies. Youths, in general, are behaving better and are holding on to quality values for their lives.

One particular parish which had promoted this programme over a good number of years had 35 trainers. The catechists in the area noticed that there was an increased attendance at catechism classes - and not all the children who came belonged to their Church! "Why do you want to attend our classes?" they often asked. The answer they often received both amazed and re-assured them: "We admire the way those who attend your classes are behaving!"

Questions for Reflection

1. What connection do you see between the sexual education programme and the improvement in community health?
2. What, do you think, gave rise to better behaviour on the part of the adolescents?

5. The Community Plans for Action

1. Focus on target groups:
 - What programmes can you set up to inform those in the 14 – 25 year-old group? These are the most vulnerable to HIV / AIDS because of the fertility patterns of girls and young women.
 - What can you do to help adults to guide their children to make their own choices based on correct information?
2. Make use of the stories above to stimulate dialogue and to lead others to make choices and create boundaries for behaviour.
3. People in general are hoping for change. Help them become confident to bring this about by stirring their interest and providing them with support.
4. What other suggestions can your group come up with?

Session 5

Church Tradition

1. Human Need Speaks to Us

“My Husband Has the Right”

Gladys was brought to the shelter for battered women by a social worker. She was accompanied by her three small children aged five, three and an infant of eleven months. Gladys was indeed battered. Her left eye was swollen, her back bleeding from lacerations and her breasts had cigarette burns on them. We later discovered that she was also HIV positive. I welcomed her to the shelter and we first fed the children, changed the baby's nappy and put him into a cot to sleep. Then I made tea and we sat down for a chat.

I asked Gladys how long her husband had been beating and abusing her. “Oh, for a long time,” she replied, “even before we got married.” “Why did you stay with him for so long?” I asked. “There was nowhere else to go” she replied. “If I had gone home they would have sent me back, saying my place is with my husband. They paid *lobola* for me, so I must let him do what he wants with me.” Then she continued: “One day I spoke to my priest about the situation.” “What did he say?” I asked. “He told me to pray to Jesus to change my husband's behaviour. You see, even the Bible says the wife must be subject to her husband. He has the right to do what he likes.”

Questions for reflection

1. Has Gladys' husband the right to treat her the way he does? Why? / Why not?
2. What do you think of the priest's response to the situation?
3. What is the way forward for Gladys now?

The Story of Father Luke

I am a priest. One evening I was sitting with two other priests watching the news on television. An item on the news got two of us exchanging stories about our sad experiences of so many who are suffering from AIDS. We felt

so hopeless in the situation and were wondering if there was anything else we could do to stop this pandemic from spreading any further. For a while Father Luke was silent. He seemed to be listening to us. Eventually he could contain himself no longer. He suddenly burst out: "Please shut up! Leave me alone! I'm sick and tired of hearing about AIDS and people dying like flies around me. To be honest, I've stopped talking and preaching about sexual morality and AIDS and condoms. I don't know what to say any more. The young people don't listen; in fact, they don't care what the Church teaches. They laugh at us, calling us irrelevant. No one is listening to us. It seems everyone is bent on self-destruction." I felt so sad for Fr Luke and for what so many of us in the Church are doing – or not doing – to help our people in this awful crisis.

Questions for Reflection

1. What gives rise to a sense of hopelessness in the face of the AIDS pandemic?
2. Do you feel like Father Luke? Why? / Why not?

2. The Word of God Speaks to Us



Luke 7: 11-17

Reaching out in compassion

Questions for Reflection

1. Reflect in silence on the following phrases:
 - ♦ "He had compassion for her"
 - ♦ "Do not cry"
 - ♦ "Jesus gave him to his mother"
2. What could we do as a community to express Jesus' compassion towards those affected by AIDS?



John 8: 1-11

Lack of condemnation

Questions for Reflection

1. What was Jesus' response to those who wanted to execute the woman caught committing adultery? Why?
2. As a follower of Jesus, how would you describe your attitude to people who suffer from HIV / AIDS?
3. How could you put this attitude into practice?

3. The Teaching Church Speaks to Us

Is morality simply a matter of blind obedience to moral laws, or is it a matter of how we human beings relate to one another and how we take responsibility for one another? The latter frequently calls for both self-giving and patient understanding of others that are more demanding than simply keeping the law. The AIDS crisis reveals not simply the existence of sexual sins but also, and much more significantly, the absence of love and care for people in their suffering.

Our moral awareness and attitudes have to grow and develop. We go through stages towards a greater moral maturity. Perhaps the AIDS crisis is God's way of challenging us to care for one another, to support the dying and to appreciate the gift of life. AIDS need not be a crisis, it could also be a God-given opportunity for moral and spiritual growth, a time to review our assumptions about sin and morality. The modern epidemic of AIDS calls for a pastoral response.

SACBC, 1990

Questions for Reflection

1. The bishops describe how Christians are called to moral maturity and responsibility. How would you explain this in your own words?
2. Apart from caring for those who are suffering, how else does the widespread existence of AIDS challenge us?

4. Reconstructing Our Lives

The Phoenix

Maria grew up in a rural area, a member of an Afrikaans family whose members were fundamentalist in their religion (they belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church) and extremely "right wing" in their political views. Despite her strict

upbringing, Maria began to engage in sexual activity once she was in her twenties. Having heard about AIDS, she went for a blood test and discovered that she was HIV positive. She felt shattered. She did not know what to do. She was afraid to tell anyone. Unable to face her family and friends, and above all the censure of her Church community, she left home and went hundreds of kilometres away to Gauteng. There she found a job, made new friends and started attending various churches.

Sometime later Maria became a Catholic and felt accepted in the local parish. She had found happiness again. One day she saw an advertisement for a post in the diocesan AIDS office. "This is something I know about from personal experience," she said to herself. "But I wonder if they would employ me." She decided, with great trepidation, to apply for the job and, at the same time, to be honest about her situation. To her surprise, but also joy, she was accepted. It had been the first time that she had revealed her HIV status and received a positive response. It actually helped her get the job!

Maria has since worked untiringly with people infected or affected by HIV / AIDS. She has been, and still is, a wonderful influence on people in need. She does not only give people information, but also hope, a positive outlook and a deepening spirituality. She organises week-end retreats for AIDS caregivers, runs healing workshops and is generally helping to combat the pandemic. She feels fulfilled and that can be seen in her joyful appearance.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why, do you think, did Maria engage in sexual activity in the first place?
2. If you were the employer, would you have given Maria the job? Why? / Why not?
3. Explain how you understand Maria giving people:
 - ♦ hope
 - ♦ a positive outlook
 - ♦ a deepening spirituality.

Outreach

When Sister Ann was first transferred to Johannesburg she was shocked to see so many women, and even girls, working as prostitutes on the streets of the city. She decided that she could not just sit back aghast at what was happening; she had to do something about the situation. Firstly, she began to work with members of the Salvation Army who were attempting to get into contact with the women, mainly by preaching to them and trying to convert them. After a while Sr. Ann was asked to leave the group because she was unable to work with

their approach. She then decided to start her own project: a centre for the women. She gathered about her some volunteers: a social worker, a counsellor in HIV / AIDS and others who were willing to work with her.

At present this group of concerned people is reaching out to the hotels of Hillbrow and Berea in order to contact women and girls. They speak with them and invite them to come to the Centre where they can be given advice and many kinds of help to get out of their painful dead-end situation. Most of the women and girls have HIV / AIDS. Some are drug addicts and alcoholics. Many are frightened to go at night to Hillbrow and Berea because of widespread crime. Yet, they have to find money somehow in order to live. All along, however, they know that behind them is Sister Ann and a group of committed people who will always be there to help them when they need it.

Questions for Reflection

1. What do you think of the approach of the Salvation Army in this story?
2. Could Sister Ann and her group be making a difference, or are they wasting their time? Explain your response.

5. The Community Plans for Action

1. Seek out shelters where abused women can be taken for safety.
2. Set up a group of parishioners, which will include men, to whom abused people could go for help.
 - What kind of training will they need?
 - Where could they seek for this help?
3. What could be done to counteract the feeling of hopelessness that so many people experience?
4. How could you work towards eradicating the stigma attached to HIV / AIDS?

Organise the parishioners as a whole to consider going for voluntary counselling and testing.
5. Plan a programme to encourage a greater sense of moral responsibility.

What would be needed to get this going?
6. Organise a week-end retreat for HIV / AIDS caregivers.
7. What other suggestions can your group come up with?

Session 6

Gender

1. Human Need Speaks to Us

Sexual Silence: The “Custom of Stepfathers”

Mpogeng had been away from class for some time. Then one day she re-appeared in the school carrying a baby boy on her back. Thuli, one of the teachers, was concerned about what she was seeing and asked Mpogeng about the baby. Although Mpogeng was keen to continue with her studies, and had to bring the baby with her as she knew of no one else who could look after him, her face expressed fear and humiliation. She did not want to talk about her baby and it took a long time for Thuli to ease the story out of her. It transpired that Mpogeng's father had been sexually abusing her for some time and, in fact, had fathered her child. “But, I'm not the only one,” she spat out as though to justify herself.

Shortly afterwards, one of the students was asked by Thuli to conduct a survey among the other female students. They discovered that, of the 226 girls interviewed, 29 were regularly abused sexually, many raped, and often by their own stepfathers. Indeed, this latter abuse was so common that many had accepted the unwritten “custom” that a stepfather has a right to sexual relations with his stepdaughter. In class these girls were introverted and silent. They had a very poor self-image and could see little hope for the future. Yet, none of them had reported this practice to any of the authorities.

Questions for Reflection

1. How do you feel about Mpogeng?
2. Why do you think Thuli conducted the survey among the female students?
3. Do you agree with Thuli, and the results of the survey, that many girls are being sexually abused within their own home? Why? /Why not?

Should I Give in?

I am a marriage counsellor and spend many hours a week sitting with couples who are having problems in their marriage. As these couples pour out their troubles I listen to the hurting relationships they are caught up in. While these vary in nature and description, a very common cause of these hurts is the inability of a married couple to sort out their differences, not just to get on together. To be married is to enter into a life journey, an on-going struggle to discover, create and maintain a balance between them. In many societies this struggle seems to be unnecessary because it is presumed that the male is the dominant figure and makes all the important decisions. The role of the female is to nurture the offspring and look after the home. In many European societies this was described as: "The man is the head, the woman is the heart of the marriage."

Today this concept is no longer working. Many women are already independent financially through earning their own salary. Many are better educated than their husbands and may even be earning more. Some women claim that the only way of maintaining their independence as a person is not to marry at all. Thus, single parent motherhood is becoming socially acceptable. For the men, this newly found independence is frightening. It has come about in a relatively short space of time and most men have not been able to adjust to it. They are not coping. As a consequence, many men opt out of their husband and fatherly role in the family, while others try to re-assert their authority, sometimes through violence. Thus, the large scale abuse that we notice in our society. Yet, in many instances women are still content to remain submissive to the man in their lives. As a society in general, we have not yet found the balance in the male-female relationship.

Questions for Reflection

"We have not yet found the balance in the male-female relationship."

1. Do you agree with this statement? Why?/ Why not?
2. How would you describe a correct balance between the husband and wife?
3. Do you agree that much domestic violence is a result of this imbalance?
Why do you think so?
4. What is your opinion about one-parent families?

2. The Word of God Speaks to Us



Ezekiel 34:1-16

Exploitation replaced by caring leadership

Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways have the leaders of God's people in Ezekiel's day failed in their duty?
2. Why do many women, particularly those suffering from HIV/AIDS, feel they are discriminated against today?
3. Have you noticed any similar problems in your own community? Tell your group.



Galatians 3:26-29

A discipleship of equals

Questions for Reflection

1. What is the source of Christian equality?
2. Why is it against Christ's teaching to discriminate against women?
3. In what ways do women suffering from HIV / AIDS suffer more than men?

3. The Teaching Church Speaks to Us

We can say with certainty that discrimination against women contradicts the will of Christ. We are painfully aware that sexism, defined as "unjust discrimination based on sex," is still present in some members of the Church. We reject sexism and pledge renewed efforts to guard against it in Church teaching and practice. We further reject extreme positions on women's issues which impede dialogue and divide the Church. We commit ourselves to making sure that our words and actions express our belief in the equality of all women and men.

U.S. Catholic Conference, 1994

When it comes to setting women free from every kind of exploitation and domination, the Gospel contains an ever relevant message which goes back to the *attitude of Jesus Christ himself*. Transcending the established norms of his own culture, Jesus treated women with openness, respect, acceptance and tenderness. In this way he honoured the dignity which women have always possessed according to God's plan and in his love. As we look to Christ at the end of this Second Millennium, it is natural to ask ourselves: how much of his message has been heard and acted upon?

Pope John Paul II: Letter to Women.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why is “sexism still present in some members of the Church”?
2. What is your answer to the Pope’s question about honouring women’s dignity:
“How much of [Christ’s] message has been heard and acted upon?”

4. Reconstructing Our Lives

“I am now my own person.”

Thembi studied hard at school and passed her matric. She then went on to a training college and became a teacher, a job she loved and in which she excelled. After a time she fell in love with a truck driver. Her parents were concerned about the relationship and had fears about the type of person she was mixing with. They advised her not to marry him but Thembi went ahead and did so. They had four children, two of whom died while still young. He began to drink and started to beat her regularly. He gave her no money, whereas she handed her cheque over to him at the end of each month, which she regarded as a marriage custom.

It was not so long before Thembi’s husband lost his job. On many occasions his drinking had prevented him from driving, and it also brought on many illnesses. The couple survived on Thembi’s earnings. She had been brought up to live married life “for better or for worse”. Meanwhile, she found meaning in her involvement in the community and the Church. She trained as a *Lifeline* counsellor. Her training and experience as a counsellor challenged her own life and she came to realise that she had a right to live a dignified life herself with her children. The money she earned was hers and was not bound by “marriage custom”. One day Thembi woke up to her situation and to the call to become her own person. She asked her husband: “Where were you when I and my children needed you? I have kept this family together by my own efforts and will. I now know who I am. You cannot hurt me anymore”. Through helping others overcome their powerlessness, she had become empowered herself. She now had the freedom to choose her own life. This made her feel fine inside.

Questions for Reflection

1. What do you think of Thembi handing over her salary to her husband?
2. Has Thembi really “become her own person”, or has she become selfish?
3. Compare the life of the children at the beginning of the story and at the end.

The Importance of Education

Maya was born in the Eastern Cape. She never knew who her father was and only heard stories about her mother from her granny who brought her up. One of her earliest memories was of her granny lying drunk on the floor and she standing, feeling hunger in her belly, in the corner of the hut which had no furniture in it.

Maya, though, enjoyed school. It was not only the friends whose company she enjoyed, but also learning itself. She poured over her school books and sucked up as much new knowledge as she could. When she came to the end of her primary school years, an inspector told the principal that Maya was showing great potential and should be assisted to continue with her education. When he discovered her home

circumstances, he himself offered to pay for her to go to the secondary school in the nearest town. Her school books remained her constant companion and, when she had finished Standard 8, she went on to train as a nurse. She fell in love with a Muslim man and became pregnant. They subsequently married. They had three boys, but later her husband started to drink a lot and to abuse her. She eventually divorced him.

Maya was still attached to learning. She went on to study business economics and became a secondary school teacher. This helped her to be financially independent and to care for her children as she had always wanted. Through her hardships she had learned to cope with life and earn self-respect and human dignity.



Questions for Reflection

1. Many children in Maya's situation are doomed to a life of poverty.
What made the difference in Maya's case?
2. What do you learn from the inspector's behaviour towards Maya?
3. Describe what you understand by "self-respect and human dignity".

5. The Community Plans for Action

1. Make use of the parish liturgy:
 - Use inclusive language.
 - In homilies challenge cultural values which lead to the oppression of women and minority groups in both the Church and society.
 - In homilies speak about the dignity of all people, including gays and lesbians.
 - Have women preaching on occasion.
 - Plan alternative liturgies in which women and men take equal roles.
2. Create support groups for gay and lesbian Catholics.
3. Make information available:
 - Publish contact numbers for safe shelters, Lifeline, Famsa (child abuse).
 - Communicate Church teaching on the equality and dignity of all persons.
4. Organise retreats for men concerning their experience in an equal society.
5. Organise retreats for women concerning a spirituality of equality.
6. Teach post-Confirmation groups about preparation for adult life, marriage and balanced relationships.
7. Lobby for all seminarians:
 - To have courses in feminist theology.
 - To learn through group experience how to accept women as equals.
8. What other suggestions can your group come up with?

Session 7

Healing

1. Human Need Speaks to Us

Dying in Anger

Paul, a man aged 39 years, appeared at a hospice in October. He was very ill, unable to walk and feeling depressed. He was withdrawn and would hardly talk at all. In December he was treated for TB and started to recover slowly. Firstly, he was able to walk with a stick, and later unaided. As he came to trust the nursing sister, he was able to share his past, the history of his sad childhood. His mother had died when he was 9 years old; Paul had actually witnessed his father killing his mother. The nursing sister helped him to put a collage together to bring these painful experiences into the open. He partly co-operated, but there was a lot of resistance in him. At about that time his father died. He went to the funeral because it was "expected of him". On his return to the hospice, however, he showed no emotion whatsoever.

A few months later a friend of Paul's in the hospice died. He wanted to attend the funeral but he refused to enter the church building. He made a noisy fuss outside the church. The nursing sister, who was with him, witnessed this. Later she set some boundaries for his behaviour and gave him options by which he could decide how he was to proceed with his life in the future. At Easter time he went home since he had recovered a little, though he was still on medication. After a few weeks, though, he returned to the hospice. He was very sick indeed. He had not been taking his medication. He had been drinking alcohol excessively and smoked continually. It was not long before he angrily faced a painful death.

Questions for Discussion

1. Describe the feelings Paul may have had about his mother's death – and about his father's death.
2. What do you think happened to Paul when he returned home at Easter?
3. Why do you think he died in anger?

Not us, surely

As a teacher in an affluent school, I knew that the girls in my class were becoming sexually active. At that stage in the early 1990s, I asked the principal's permission to introduce sexuality education into the school curriculum. Her reply to me was "No! The children in this school all come from good Catholic homes and we do not need to teach them at this early age about sex." I was therefore forbidden to talk about sexual issues. A few years later, one of the girls who had been in that class of mine died of an AIDS related illness.

To this day, the priest and parishioners of the parish in which that school is situated continue to deny the fact that there are any people within the parish who could be HIV positive. There has been opposition among parishioners to anyone speaking about AIDS, praying for people who are living with and dying of AIDS, let alone implementing any programme to help people who are either infected or affected by AIDS.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why do you think the principal forbade sexuality education in the school?
2. The priest and parishioners seem to be in a state of denial. Why?
3. What do they think may be the future of the adolescents in this parish?

2. The Word of God Speaks to Us



Mark 10: 13-16 *Jesus and the children*

Questions for reflection

1. Why did the disciples want to turn the children away from Jesus?
2. Jesus "put his arms round [the children], laid his hands on them and gave them his blessing." In what ways can we use the power of touch for those in need of healing?



Luke 21: 1-4 *The widow's mite*

Questions for Reflection

1. How much did the widow contribute to the economy of the Temple?
2. Why did Jesus consider her offering as "more than any of them"?
3. What can this story teach us about facing the pandemic of HIV / AIDS?

3. The Teaching Church Speaks to Us

Any Christian consideration of a pastoral response to persons with AIDS must begin by looking at the example of Jesus in the Gospels. There we see that Jesus, confronted with the sickness and suffering of people, and above all their rejection by society because they were considered to be “sinners”, is always filled with deep compassion and a willingness to heal. The leper said to him: “Lord, if you want to, you can cure me.” Jesus’ reply was: “Of course, I want to!” (Mk. 1:40-41). In his ministry, Jesus sought to overcome the prejudice, suspicion and fear that surrounds diseases such as leprosy which alienated people from society.

It is this attitude of Jesus, who mixes with outcasts and shares meals with them, that must inspire the corresponding attitude that Christians need to shape in the face of AIDS. One of the saddest examples of the AIDS crisis is the experience of rejection that persons with AIDS feel. The God Jesus reveals in the Gospels is a compassionate and loving Father who forgives. Moreover, Jesus tries to impress upon people that **all**, including the Pharisees who supposedly “keep the law”, are in need of forgiveness. Human self-righteousness and judging others are sins that Jesus clearly condemned.

SACBC, 1990

Questions for Reflection

1. How did Jesus’ attitude to the sick differ from the common view of those days?
2. In what way is this “common view” prevalent today?
3. Describe in your own words the Christian attitude towards those who are suffering from HIV / AIDS.



4. Reconstructing Our Lives

Facing Challenge in a Heroic Way

Lettie, a retired nurse in the parish, saw the huge amount of suffering that existed among the people in the area. She decided to work with orphans, most of whom had lost their parents to AIDS. She began by calling the children together and feeding them with whatever she could get hold of. She would visit the supermarkets and collect whatever food they could no longer sell, like bread baked the day before and vegetables which were no longer at their best. Some shopkeepers even kept aside food for her so that the orphaned children could receive as healthy a diet as possible.

Lettie then began to grow vegetables so that they would not be completely dependent on hand-outs. Some other adults in the parish helped her in the kitchen garden. Lettie taught some of the older children how to care for the plants, water them and harvest them at the right time. Soon they were contributing considerably to their own needs. This effort grew into a soup kitchen so that many other poor and hungry people could be fed.

The next step was to produce seeds from their own plants. These they sold to people in the area who then started their own gardens at home. One day Lettie was given an award from a local community service organisation for her work in building up a community by reaching out to those in need. Lettie was surprised by this. "All I did," she said, "was to see children going hungry and so I fed them."

Questions for Reflection

1. What is the difference between Paul's attitude to life (the first story) and Lettie's?
2. Describe how the orphans may have felt as Lettie led them to self-sufficiency.
3. Why was Lettie surprised when she received an award?

"There is no Dustbin for a Human Being"

Miriam was 32 years of age when her husband died. She had no children of her own and was living alone. The hunger of the children in the area kept on pressing against her heart. "Surely there is something I can do," she often said to herself. She fell sick and discovered that she had gallstones. She prayed to God: "If you cure me from this I will do something for you. I don't know what it will be, but I

know that you will show me." She was sick for six months but she did eventually recover.

Having recovered, though still feeling weak, Mirriam was standing at her gate one day, watching the children playing in the streets. She wondered to herself: "How many of these children are orphans? Maybe if I can collect these children together I will be able to do something for God." She collected seven other women from the area to work with her and they opened Mirriam's house for the children. Every day they provided lunch for the children after school. On Fridays they gave all the children bread for the weekend. If any came during the weekends and begged: "Gogo, I am hungry," she fed them. Neither Mirriam nor the other women were rich. They just gave from the little they had. When anyone asked Mirriam: "Why do you do this when you are not well off yourself?" she would answer: "There is no dustbin for a human being."

Questions for Reflection

1. Was Mirriam working for the good of the children or for God?
2. Why was it important that Mirriam called other women to help her?
3. "There is no dustbin for a human being". Explain this in your own words.

5. The Community Plans for Action

1.
 - Form a group of parishioners to visit and assist people seriously ill and dying.
 - Discover those who know about the stages dying people go through (e.g.: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance – see Elizabeth Kübler Ross).
 - Ask them to assist this group in dealing with people at each of these stages.
2. Work with people outside the parish boundaries who have already taken an initiative in caring for the dying.
3. Invite parishioners to involve themselves in the work of a local hospice.
4. What could be done to help those who are HIV / AIDS positive to stand on their own feet?
5. What other suggestions can your group come up with?

Session 8

Caring

1. Human Need Speaks to Us

“We do not Care!”

For a long time Thandi, a ten-year-old girl, has been looking after her mother who has been suffering from an illness that nobody will name. She has also acted as “mother” to her two younger brothers. All of this took a lot of her energy and caused her great stress. She had opted out of school in order to care for the whole family which had already been abandoned by their father. Eventually her mother died and at the funeral Thandi, for the first time, heard the word “AIDS” being mentioned by the neighbours. Now Thandi must care for her two younger brothers, although they had no income.

Thandi decided that she wanted to return to school and get on with her education. Apart from the stigma attached to the cause of her mother’s death, she also has no money to buy a school uniform or pay for school fees. The principal refused her a place in the school.

When some of the neighbours heard about this they decided to go to the principal themselves and explain the situation to her. She would not budge. Although the principal used the excuse of a lack of uniform and money to pay fees, they were pretty sure that it was the stigma of AIDS which was frightening her into rejecting Thandi. These neighbours then approached the School Governing Body which supported the principal. They even quoted the Constitution of South Africa which says that every child has a right to education and cannot be refused entrance to school because of a lack of school fees. “We do not care,” they replied, “the principal’s decision is final.”

Questions for Discussion

1. What do you think Thandi’s future will be?
2. What would you do about the action of the principal and the School Governing Body?
3. Describe a similar problem in your area?

What about the Orphans?

There was a certain woman who became very sick. She was diagnosed as having AIDS. As the sickness progressed she became weaker. After some time she was unable to work any longer and had to retire. She remained at home with her three young sons, aged 13, 9 and 7 years. They did all they could to look after her. When some of the parishioners visited her and saw her condition they suggested that she go to a hospice where she could be looked after properly. She agreed to this and moved into the hospice where she died not long after.

The father of these three boys had already left their mother and had remarried. When asked to care for his children, he replied: "I have another family now. I am unable to care for those boys. Let them look after themselves." The boys, then, were left to live by themselves, with no one to look after them. No member of the family came near. Every night they go to bed hungry. Every morning they wake up with nothing to eat or to drink. They go from house to house begging for food. Although they still attend school, they are unable to pay for their school fees, uniforms, books or food.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why were the parishioners concerned about the dying woman, but not her three sons?
2. What future do you see for these three boys?
3. What do you think will happen to the thousands of AIDS orphans in this country?

2. The Word of God Speaks to Us



Luke 18: 35-43 *Curing the blind man*

Questions for Reflection

1. Why did people in the crowd tell the blind man to keep quiet?
2. Why did the blind man go on shouting to Jesus?
3. What is required of us that we listen to those crying out for acceptance and help in their sickness?



Luke 6: 36-38 *Compassion instead of condemning*

Questions for Reflection

1. Why does Jesus teach us not to judge and condemn?
2. What would your community look like if everyone offered compassion and pardon to those suffering from sickness?
3. Summarise this teaching in a sentence of your own.

3. The Teaching Church Speaks to Us

As Christians it is our duty to reach out and to accompany persons with AIDS and their families, as they go through the inevitable stages of anger, depression and feeling alienated. We congratulate the many individuals and support groups who have done this already and who continue to search for more effective ways of responding in a loving and creative way to the reality. We believe, moreover, that persons with AIDS themselves can teach us much. There are many examples of the courage and determination, especially in the face of death, of persons with AIDS. Despite their own fears and pain, they have learned to grow in a relationship of trust in God in a situation that may have appeared to them to be utterly meaningless, and some of them spend their last days in helping others manifesting “the works of God” (John 9:3).

SACBC, 1990

Questions for Reflection

1. How can “persons with AIDS themselves teach us much”?
2. Talk about people who have shown courage and determination when they were seriously ill?
3. What could you, as a community, do to help sick people take on a positive attitude?

4. Reconstructing our Lives

Expensive Funerals

In a certain large town a lot of discussion used to take place among a certain group of Christians about the high cost of funerals. Many families had gone into

debt because of the expense. They feel it is necessary to do this because everybody else does. They must make sure that everything is of the best. Yet the effect this was having on poor families, and particularly orphans, was devastating. One day there was an open discussion about the matter and the local bishop attended. He questioned whether the present pattern of spending so much on a funeral was distracting people from the true role of African culture regarding funerals. After listening to this debate, an Anglican minister started preaching on this in her church. She encouraged the parishioners to:

- ◆ only visit the family for a short while and bring something to eat rather than stay for a meal;
- ◆ keep the cost of a funeral to the minimum by, for example, not covering the body or the coffin with a skin or a blanket; and also by purchasing cheaper coffins;
- ◆ pay R2.00 as they got on to the bus when going to the graveside;
- ◆ not to go to a family's house after the funeral; let only the close family members gather.

People did not like these ideas and were afraid to put them into practice, lest they be badly thought of by their neighbours. Then one member of the parish, whose daughter had died of AIDS, was brave enough to follow these suggestions at her daughter's funeral. She had decided that it did not matter if others branded the funeral as "poor". After that, more parishioners followed her example and now this has become an established practice in that parish. It is also spreading among others in the community, as well as in other Churches.

Questions for Reflection

1. What do you think of the suggestions of the Anglican minister?
2. List some of the pressures on people to "make sure that everything is of the best" at a funeral.
3. Would your family feel free enough to have a "poor funeral"? Explain.

"I Want Them to Live in the Light"

Ellie knew that she was HIV positive, but she was able to keep it a secret for two years. When she finally informed her parents of her condition they threw her out of the house. "You are no longer a member of our family," they shouted at her. She went to work in Johannesburg and every month faithfully sent money to her parents. But they refused to accept it. Ellie talked to her fellow parishioners, some of whom went to talk to the priest of her home congregation. He, in turn, went to talk to Ellie's parents. But they were adamant. They would

have nothing more to do with their daughter. "Indeed, she is no longer our daughter, but an outsider, a shame on the whole community," they said.

When Ellie heard of this she decided to give money every month to her brother who, after some time, was able to build a house. When the parents discovered with whose money the house had been built, they came and broke it down! One of Ellie's cousins then went to speak with the parish priest again. This time the whole family came together with the priest to discuss the situation. It was only after this meeting, during which there was a lot of heated argument, that the parents began to see the situation from their daughter's point of view. This consoled Ellie very much. Three months later she was facing death, yet she felt peace in her heart, knowing that she had been reconciled with her family. A year later the family unveiled Ellie's tombstone and her father gave a speech to all those assembled. "I am going to organise a group of young people," he told them, "and I am going to educate them about this terrible disease called AIDS. At the moment they are living in darkness. I want them to live in the light."

Questions for Discussion

1. What do you think of the attitude and behaviour of Ellie's parents?
2. Why do you think Ellie continued to support her family financially?
3. What brought about a change in Ellie's father?
4. What could be done to remove the stigma attached to HIV / AIDS in your community?

5. The Community Plans for Action

1. How could you inform people of the widespread need to be compassionate towards people sick with HIV / AIDS?
How could you motivate them to act on their behalf?
2. What are the particular needs of orphans?
Organise people to address these needs.
3. Set up a group to help families to care for their members who are sick with HIV/AIDS.
4. Get a discussion going in the parish about the high cost of funerals.
What practical suggestions would you like to put before them?
5. Do you know of families who have rejected sick members?
What could you do to bring about a reconciliation?
6. What other suggestions can your group come up with?

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