

ARCHDIOCESE OF LOS ANGELES HIV/AIDS PASTORAL MINISTRY

**Fr. Chris Ponnet, Director/Representative of Archbishop Gomez 323 225 4461 x221
Vision Statement**

We are called to be compassionate of all those living with HIV/AIDS.

We are called to love those with HIV/AIDS, recognizing that HIV/AIDS is not a punishment from God, but rather that God is present and loving and a source of strength for all who are suffering.

We are called to uphold the dignity of human life and commit ourselves to cherish each person living with HIV/AIDS.

We are called to be instruments of the reign of God and as Church we commit ourselves to build a community of faith and love, which includes those living with HIV/AIDS.

A Global Catholic Perspective: The Church's Response to AIDS

Based on a speech by Fr. Robert Vitillo

Catholic leaders and the believing community as a whole have translated their theories about the Church's role as educator in the field of HIV/AIDS prevention into practical, everyday actions. In Zimbabwe, for example, the National Catholic Development Commission produced a brochure, AIDS and the Christian, which highlights five steps to be taken by Catholics in response to HIV/AIDS:

1. Know the facts,
2. Respect God's law,
3. Love faithfully,
4. Protect yourself and your family and,
5. Have compassion on sufferers.



Many Catholic Church-sponsored educational efforts make a special commitment to educate young people before they begin sexual activity or before they establish harmful patterns of sexual behavior or of drug and alcohol use. In Uganda, a Catholic sister has developed guidelines for teaching about sexuality and human relationships, An Education for Life Series.

In several countries of Africa, Anti-AIDS clubs have been founded by the Catholic Church and organizations of other faith traditions. In these groups, young people commit themselves to learn the facts related to HIV/AIDS and to reinforce their learning activity with peer social support and by offering assistance to those who are already ill from, or dying of, AIDS.

In the Philippines and Chile, national and local Catholic social service agencies have organized educational exhibits about HIV/AIDS for students in primary and secondary schools as well as in universities.

In many countries of the Southern Hemisphere, faith-based organizations take responsibility for more than one half of the infrastructure for health care. Very often, these church-sponsored services are the only ones to reach out beyond the capital cities and the more populated areas. In places where an elevated HIV-infection rate can be noted, Catholic hospitals and clinics have faced many new burdens. In response to resource shortages, overcrowding, and staff "burnout," numerous Catholic health

facilities, most especially those located in Africa and Latin America, have developed mobile home care programs which dispatch staff and trained volunteers to assist people in caring for family members who have AIDS in their own homes. The volunteers do not require sophisticated training; frequently, **they are catechists, village health workers, or local parishioners.**

In addition to programs with a direct medical focus, church-related organizations have been called upon to provide psychological and social support to persons with HIV/AIDS and to their families and loved ones. Such responses include:

- Initiating economic development opportunities for HIV-infected persons who have lost employment and social insurance benefits;
- Nurturing and educating thousands of children whose parents have either died or have become severely incapacitated as a result of HIV-related illnesses;
- Caring for elderly persons who are surviving their adult children and thus are unable to rely on the traditional systems of family care.

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## **General Information about HIV/AIDS**

**Overview: Some Basic Questions Answered** - From *“Guidelines for the Giving of Pastoral Care to Those Persons who are Infected/Affected by HIV/AIDS”* by Rev. Don Nations, **Archdiocesan AIDS Resource Manual**, Portland, Oregon. Adapted and updated by E.C. Breen, Ph.D. .

### **What is HIV?**

The term “HIV” stands for *Human Immunodeficiency Virus*. HIV acts in a way that is consistent with all other viruses: it finds a cell in which it can live, then begins to reproduce and further infect its host. What makes this virus different is that it destroys the human immune system – the body’s white blood cells. This virus enters certain types of white blood cells, most notably a T-lymphocyte known as a T-helper cell. As HIV replicates itself, T-helper cells are destroyed. This process continues until the immune system becomes deficient (hence the name) and cannot fight off diseases. Without a functioning immune system to fight off other germs, people with HIV become susceptible to being infected by bacteria, fungi, other viruses and to developing certain types of cancer.

### **What is AIDS?**

The term “AIDS” stands for *Acquired ImmunoDeficiency Syndrome*. When an HIV-infected person has lost enough T-helper cells for the immune system to become deficient, s/he may develop life-threatening infections such as pneumonia, meningitis, or tuberculosis, and/or certain types of cancer. A person who is infected with HIV is not considered to have AIDS until s/he has contracted one of these serious illnesses or has a very low T-helper cell count. When a person is diagnosed with AIDS, s/he is in the final stages of a series of health problems caused by HIV.

There are several different conditions that qualify as “AIDS-defining conditions” in adults, such as Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia, Kaposi's sarcoma, or a T-helper cell count of less than 200 cells/mm<sup>3</sup> of blood. Many persons with AIDS could have several completely different infections or cancers. This is the reason that AIDS is called a *syndrome*, which is a medical term that refers to a group of signs and symptoms that collectively indicate or characterize a disease.

## How Is HIV Spread?

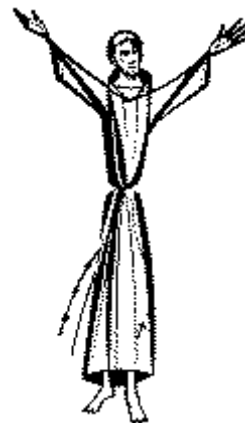
Only four body fluids have been found to definitely pass HIV from one person to another: blood, semen, vaginal secretions and breast milk. Saliva is not capable of spreading the virus, unless blood is also present in the saliva.

There are three ways in which HIV is known to be transmitted (passed from one person to another). They are:

1. **Contact with blood from an HIV-infected person.** This can occur, for example, through any type of sharing or re-use of needles between an HIV-infected person and a non-infected person sharing needles when shooting drugs - tattoos or body piercings with unsterilized needles. Prior to the spring of 1985, blood transfusions and other blood products could spread the virus. Presently, all blood donated in the U.S. is tested for HIV before use, and is discarded if found to be HIV-positive. Since the late 1990s the risk of HIV infection from a transfusion is estimated to be extremely low, approximately one in 678,000 transfusions.
2. **Sexual activity.** Sexual activity can spread HIV because the virus is present in semen and vaginal fluids of HIV-infected persons. It does not matter whether this sexual activity is homosexual or heterosexual--all types of sexual activity can transmit the virus.
3. **Mother to child.** An HIV-infected pregnant woman can pass the virus to her infant. This can occur during pregnancy, at delivery, or through breast milk.

## HIV is *NOT* spread through:

- Contact with saliva, tears, or sweat
- Shaking hands or hugging
- Sharing food utensils
- Sharing linens, like towels and bedding
- Swimming in the same pool
- Normal contact children experience in schools and homes
- Using the same telephone
- Using the same toilet seats
- Urine or Feces
- Bites from insects or other animals
- Coughing or sneezing
- Daily living with someone who has HIV
- Being near a person who is HIV positive or through the air



## How Contagious Is the Virus?

HIV is not *contagious* – you can't simply “catch” the virus because it is not transmitted through the air, by insects, animals or through casual contact. Under certain circumstances HIV is *infectious* – the blood, semen, vaginal secretions or breast milk of someone who is already infected must come into direct contact with your blood stream in order for you to become infected.

## Is There A Cure for HIV/AIDS?

**NO.** Although there are new anti-viral drug treatments that have had some success in slowing the progress of HIV disease, there is no cure for HIV infection or AIDS. Because HIV is a virus that lives inside white blood cells, it will be very difficult to ever achieve a “cure” in the medical sense, that is, completely eradicating HIV throughout a person's body. One goal for combating HIV infection and “curing” AIDS is to be able to keep the virus under control, thereby preventing immune deficiency and

disease. Another goal is to develop an HIV vaccine that could either boost the immune system in persons already infected or prevent HIV infection in persons exposed to the virus.

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RESPONSES: VATICAN

All concern for the sick and suffering is part of the Church's life and mission. The Church has always understood herself to be charged by Christ with the care of the poor, the weak, the defenseless, the suffering and those who mourn. Today you are faced with the present crisis of immense proportions: that of AIDS. You are called to show the love and compassion of Christ and his Church. As you courageously affirm and implement your moral obligation and social responsibility to help those who suffer, you are, individually and collectively, living out the parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:30-32) . . . To be "neighbor" is to express love, solidarity and service, and to exclude selfishness, discrimination and neglect. (*Pope John Paul II, Mission Dolores Basilica, San Francisco, September 17, 1987*)

People with AIDS provide us with an opportunity to be with the suffering, to be compassionate toward those whom we might otherwise fear, to bring strength and courage both to those who face the prospect of dying as well as to their loved ones. For the Christian, people with AIDS must not become occasions for stereotyping or prejudice, for anger or recrimination, for rejection or isolation, for injustice or condemnation. (*Pope John Paul II, Phoenix, Arizona, September 14, 1987*)

Through the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Pope expressed his "esteem for their work and the dedication it requires." He gave thanks for the lives saved by Highly Active Anti-Retroviral Treatment (HAART) and for the use of "Treatment as Prevention" and noted that such efforts "give witness to the possibilities for beneficial outcome when all sectors of society unite in common purpose." Finally, he assured the participants of his prayers "that all advances in pharmacology, treatment, and research will be matched by a firm commitment to promote the integral development of each person as a beloved child of God." (Pope Francis July 22, 2015)

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For St. Paul love is the greatest of spiritual gifts. St. John considers love to be the most certain sign of God's presence. Jesus proposes it as the basis of his two great commandments that fulfill all the law and the prophets.

Love, too, is the continuing story of every family's life. Love can be shared, nurtured, rejected, and sometimes lost. To follow Christ's way of love is the challenge before every family today. Your family now has an added opportunity to share love and to accept love. Our church communities are likewise called to an exemplary standard of love and justice.

### **Pastoral Care**

Ministering to people with HIV/AIDS and those whose families are touched by HIV/AIDS may differ in some ways from ministering to people with most other illnesses. The HIV/AIDS crisis often provides a forum for stereotyping and prejudice, anger and recrimination, rejection and isolation, injustice and condemnation. The social stigma and harsh social judgments associated with HIV/AIDS, coupled with the high incidence of fear and ignorance about this condition, set this ministry apart. It is the unique challenge of the Church to support and respond to all of the challenges created by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and particularly those that are spiritual.

“Christ’s compassion toward the sick and his many healings of every kind of infirmity are resplendent signs that God has visited his people and that the kingdom of God is close at hand. Jesus has the power not only to heal, but also to forgive sins, he has come to heal the whole man, soul and body; he is the physician the sick have need of. His compassion toward all who suffer goes so far that he identifies himself with them: I was sick and you visited me. His preferential love for the sick has not ceased through the centuries to draw the very special attention of Christians toward all those who suffer in body and soul. It is the source of tireless efforts to comfort them.” (Catholic Catechism, #1503)

**Outreach Activity** - AIDS quilts are made to honor the memory of those who have died from the complication of AIDS. You may choose to create a panel privately as a personal memorial to someone you’ve loved, but we encourage you to follow the traditions of old fashioned sewing and quilting bees, by including friends, family, and co-workers.

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Pastoral Care I: Theological and Pastoral Assumptions:

- We share a consistent life ethic: We believe in the dignity of each person. This speaks of a God who accompanies all people on their life journey, not a God who abandons them. Catholic social justice teaching is a frame of reference.
- Human sexuality is good and beautiful. It is a gift that we must use responsibly.
- Freedom of conscience and choice are companions to responsibility.
- Jesus’ message of hope and the promise of the Kingdom to come are directed at the most marginalized in society. This is the radical justice of the Gospels.

The Catholic Church itself is one of the biggest global health providers. It runs thousands of hospitals and dispensaries as well as houses for people who are elderly, chronically ill or who have physical or learning disabilities.

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**RESOURCES: Caritas International and Center for Disease Control**

Msgr. Vitillo shared data from a survey undertaken during the past year. He noted the impressive outcomes reported by Catholic Relief Services (CRS – Caritas member organization from the USA) from its 9-year coordination of the AIDS Relief Programme in 10 countries of the world. During that time period, CRS channeled more than US\$740 million in support from PEPFAR (the US President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) Programme. These services reached 713,000 clients, and were able to enroll 395,000 on treatment. Training of 30,000 staff was undertaken; most of the staff and volunteers worked in community-based settings. CRS reported very low statistics on clients lost to follow-up and on patient mortality. Most significant was the fact that more than 85 percent of clients had significantly low amount of virus and thus were less likely to pass the infection to other persons.

Msgr. Vitillo also reported impressive results from several African countries.

## About the Author: Rev. Msgr. Robert Vitillo



Rev. Msgr. Robert J. Vitillo works for Caritas Internationalis as both Head of Delegation to the United Nations in Geneva and Special Advisor on HIV/AIDS and Health. Msgr. Vitillo is a trained social worker and psychotherapist. His expertise includes: child protection and social services, adoption, migration and refugee services, human rights, integral human development, management, HIV/AIDS and health. He speaks English, French, Spanish and Italian.

Caritas Internationalis is the global confederation of 164 Catholic organisations working on behalf of the poor. It is the arm through which the Church delivers its moral mission to help the most vulnerable and excluded people, whatever their religion or race.

Since 1987, Caritas Internationalis has taken a lead role in promoting just and compassionate care to people living with HIV/AIDS. The disease has now claimed the lives of more than 30 million people – many in the poorest corners of the world. But there is good news – deaths have fallen by 30% and more people than ever before have access to medicines. The battle against HIV/AIDS is far from over. (Caritas Internationalis <http://www.caritas.org>)

HIV/AIDS is one of the many programs supported by Caritas Internationalis - Since 1990, CCUSA Disaster Operations have coordinated the Catholic Church's response to thousands of disasters; the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks, the 2005 Hurricane Season, the 2010 Gulf Coast Oil Disaster, the 2011 Spring Storms and most recently, the impact of Super storm Sandy. For every dollar donated to Catholic Charities agencies approximately 90 cents goes directly to programs and services across the country that serve over 10 million people each year regardless of their religious, social or economic backgrounds. . (Caritas Internationalis <http://www.caritas.org>)

Deaths: An estimated 13,712 people with an AIDS diagnosis died in 2012, and approximately 658,507 people in the United States with an AIDS diagnosis have died overall. ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov))

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Pastoral Care Guidelines for persons with HIV/AIDS

*Adapted from "Guidelines for the Giving of Pastoral Care to Those Persons who are Infected/affected by HIV/AIDS" by Rev. Don Nations, **Archdiocesan AIDS Resource Manual**, Portland, Oregon.*

Let the individual set the agenda.

2. Confidentiality is a must.
3. Do not ask how someone contracted the virus.
4. Avoid the "Blame Game."
5. Compassion is the key.
6. Confront your own fears.

7. Focus on life, not death.
8. Communicate hope.
9. Affirm the worth of the person.
10. Feel free to show emotion.
11. Remember to touch.
12. Look for the stages of grief.
13. Be aware of psychosocial issues.
14. Expressions of spirituality vary from person to person.
15. Avoid saying, "I know how you feel."
16. Get educated.
17. Pastoral care is usually a long process.
18. Know your limits.
19. Every situation can be used by God for growth as God's people.
20. Doctrine and dogma do not substitute for sharing and love.



HIV/AIDS has also raised awareness of discrimination and injustice. We as church must condemn as immoral any discrimination in word or action. We come today to seek forgiveness if we--as individuals or as church--are guilty of homophobia, sexism or racism. We commit to the spirituality of our Psalm--asking to see the face of God--especially in those who are ill.

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**Discussion:**

- Discuss how God is present in pain and death.
- Discussion of your faith, hopes and beliefs.
- Some suggestions for following up on this presentation with community action.

Our main objective is to continue to bring awareness of HIV/AIDS. You are welcome to help with any of the functions below. Examples of what parishes offer:

1. We have an annual Anointing Mass for those who are sick, sponsored by the AIDS Ministry.
2. We participate in a couple of Taize Prayer Services throughout the year with the Youth Group.
3. We participate in Sunday Breakfasts.
4. We participate in the Las Posadas.
5. We participate in the Lenten Soup Dinners.
6. We support the annual AIDS Walk Los Angeles.
7. We attend the World AIDS Day Mass at the Cathedral.
8. We arrange speakers for the Confirmation class when requested.

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**CLOSING PRAYER**

**MOTHER OF GOD, LIGHT IN ALL DARKNESS**

Mother of God, Light in All Darkness,

Shelter Him, our flame of hope,  
With your tender hands.

And in our times of dread and nightmares,  
Let Him be our dream of comfort.

And in our times of physical pain and  
Suffering,  
Let Him be our healer.

And in our times of separation from God and  
One another let Him be our communion.

AMEN.

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**OPENING PRAYER**

Where there is charity and wisdom, there is neither fear nor ignorance.

Where there is patience and humility, there is neither anger nor disturbance.

Where there is poverty with joy, there is neither greed nor avarice.

Where there is rest and meditation, there is neither anxiety nor restlessness.

Where there is fear of the Lord to guard an entrance,  
there the enemy cannot have a place to enter.

Where there is a heart full of mercy and discernment,  
there is neither excess nor hardness of heart.