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A statement from the Primate on World AIDS, 2009

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Archbishop Fred Hiltz, Anglican Church of Canada

December 01, 2009 - An interview with the Rev. Patricia Sawo, a church leader and mother living with HIV in Kenya inspired Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams to entitle his World Aids Day Message A Space for Hope. Patricia says of her church "My congregation knows about my status and people in my church know that this is a place where, if they come with HIV, they can be loved." The Archbishop says "when the Church is doing its job, it is providing space for people to face themselves, to be themselves, and to cope with the future."

On my trip to Burundi in February, I saw numerous examples of that kind of space. Let me cite just two. In the heart of the city of Bujumbura there is an HIV/AIDS clinic. Above the main entrance of the administration building is a sign stating that the building was renovated through a gift of the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF) of the Anglican Church of Canada. That gift inspired other churches in the city to make contributions to expand the services of this clinic which serves teens and young adults who have been orphaned through AIDS. Most of them live on the street and their life is very rough. The clinic is a haven where they can learn about HIV/AIDS, get tested and if necessary receive treatment and counseling. As the Archbishop says, they can "face themselves, be themselves, and cope with the future."

Up in the hills, "in the bush" as Burundians say, in the village of Bitare, I and Cheryl Curtis (Executive Director of PWRDF) and Maureen Bailey (Youth Council, PWRDF) were invited to assist local people in laying the foundation stone for a new HIV/AIDS clinic. It was very humbling to kneel down and share in that work as hundreds of people looked on and sang and prayed for God's blessing on this project. The building is now complete and providing services to hundreds of people in Bitare and a number of surrounding villages. Individuals and families are feeling support and care. Lives are being changed and hope is rising like the glory of a new day.

This coming Sunday, the second in Advent, I ask that throughout the Church, prayers of special intent for those living with HIV/AIDS be included in the Prayers of the People. Pray for their caregivers and for their doctors and nurses and clergy. Pray especially for the work of the Mother's Union in Africa and their deep and steadfast commitment to helping those who are living with AIDS and those who have been widowed and orphaned through AIDS, and those who are caring for their grandchildren. Pray for those engaged in education about healthy sexuality and the prevention of AIDS. And as we pray for the eradication of the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS, pray also for that "space" the Church is called to provide where people can be welcomed and free to face themselves and be themselves without fear of rejection; where through loving care and support they can cope with their future. This calling is after the very example of Our Lord who reached out and "touched" (Mark 1: 40-41) the sick with love and mercy.

I encourage one and all to pray, to support the continuing work with HIV/AIDS, and to stand with all those who are pressuring world leaders, in the words of one of the Millennium Development Goals, "to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases." I issue this call in the name of him whose Advent sets us free, whose love brings healing and hope to all.

Subjects:

World AIDS Day

AIDS (Disease) - Religious aspects - Anglican Church of Canada

AIDS (Disease) - Religious aspects - Anglican Church of Burundi

AIDS (Disease) - Africa

AIDS (Disease) - Burundi