

## HIV and AIDS Stigma Discussion Sheet

### Facts about HIV and AIDS

- AIDS is the fourth largest cause of death in the world.
- Two million people die from HIV and AIDS every year.
- 33 million people live with the disease.
- 2.5 million children in the world suffer from HIV and AIDS.
- 300 000 children die every year from HIV and AIDS.
- 15 million children have been orphaned by HIV and AIDS.
- Sub-Saharan Africa remains the hardest-hit region, with 10% of the world's population but 60% of the world's people who live with HIV and AIDS.
- UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon said in a 2008 report on HIV and AIDS that:  
*"Stigma remains the single most important barrier to public action. It is a main reason why too many people are afraid to see a doctor to determine whether they have the disease, or to seek treatment if so. It helps make AIDS the silent killer, because people fear the social disgrace of speaking about it, or taking easily available precautions. Stigma is a chief reason why the AIDS epidemic continues to devastate societies around the world"*
- The Oxford Canadian Dictionary defines stigma as a mark or sign of disgrace or discredit; an unfavourable reputation; a distinguishing mark or characteristic.

### Scripture

"Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward." — Mathew 10:41-42

"So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him." — Luke 10:32-34

### Discussion Questions

1. Some experts say that the reason for much of the stigma attached to HIV and AIDS is that it is *sometimes* transmitted through sexual activity. How is Christo's assertion that how someone contracts HIV and AIDS is irrelevant a challenge to you? How is it a challenge to the Church?

2. Christo refers to HIV as a life sentence, instead of a death sentence. What parts of his story of living with HIV surprised you? How would Christo's experience be different from those of children and their parents living with HIV and AIDs in Sub-Saharan Africa?
3. Christo was pleasantly surprised and relieved at how his friends and family did not stigmatize him, but gathered around in love and support. He refers to the hymn "What a Friend we Have in Jesus," and says that he discovered what a Jesus he had in his friends. What difference did the love and support of friends, family and the Church make in Christo's journey?
4. The verse from Matthew seems to refer to *who* and *how* we interact with others when they need our help. To give a cup of cold water to a little one refers to reaching out to someone who might not be believed to be worthy of help and support from society. How does that fit with how the world treats people living with — and dying from — HIV and AIDs?
5. Do you believe that the issue of stigma, as referenced in the quote from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, is as powerful in North America as it is in Sub-Saharan Africa? Discuss practical ways that stigma can be overcome no matter where it occurs.
6. The verse from Luke is from the passage known as the story of the Good Samaritan. If you're not familiar with it, take a moment to read the whole passage. You will see that the least likely to help someone in need was, in fact, the only one to help the hurt traveler. What message can we take from this story in how we relate to people living with HIV and AIDs, and what invisible stigmas we might be harbouring in our own hearts and lives?

### Closing Prayer

Dear God,

Thank you that you are a Holy God who has shown that you are without stigma, that you prejudice against no one, that you welcome everyone into your grace and love. We confess our own hidden prejudices; the ones that lurk in our own hearts and the ones that still might beat in the structures of the Church. We ask you to forgive us for what we have done and said that we should not have; and what we have left undone and unsaid that we should have. We pray for greater dignity for those living with HIV and AIDs. We pray that Christo's story of HIV as a "life sentence" instead of a death sentence would be the norm, instead of the rare exception. Help us to be Jesus in a friend to those in need. Help us to accept the Jesus in our friends when we are the ones who need the help.

Amen