



Office of the President

**A Message from the Jesuit Conference of Africa and Madagascar (JCAM) on World AIDS Day 2021.**

***End inequalities, End AIDS, End pandemics: that all may enjoy lasting fruits of health and wellbeing***

The theme of the World AIDS Day 2021 is: “End inequalities, End AIDS, End pandemics.” Since 1988, the World AIDS Day has enabled humanity to reflect on the devastation caused by the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Over 35 million people have lost their lives due to AIDS-related causes since 1981 when the first case was reported. Although the rate of new infections dropped by 30% in 2020, about 1.5 million new infections were estimated to have occurred; 1.3 million of them were adults, while 160,000 were children under 15 years of age. Over 37 million are living with the virus. In 2020 new infections in sub-Saharan Africa were estimated to be 870,000, with young girls under 24 being the most affected.

Twenty years ago, the Society of Jesus created the Jesuit AIDS Network (AJAN) to assist and restore the dignity of people infected or affected by HIV and AIDS. The mission of AJAN is guided by the Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus, which include *showing the way to God, walking with the excluded, journeying with the youth and caring for our common home*. Through the promotion of preventive strategies and awareness creation, AJAN is actively concerned about the most vulnerable in society – the sick, elderly people and young people, who are most affected by HIV.

According to UNAIDS, “despite the world having the wherewithal to overcome HIV/AIDS, structural inequalities have made it difficult for proven solutions for prevention and treatment being effectively implemented.” This year’s theme recognises that there are inequalities in the way countries and societies are responding to AIDS and other pandemics like Covid-19; that we need to end these inequalities because they are a threat to human and ecological life and wellbeing.

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This theme correlates strongly with the theme of the Ignatian Year (500 years of the conversion of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit Order): “to see all things new in Christ.” Both themes call for more engagement, conversion or change, in order to promote the wellbeing and dignity of all, as well as increase our commitment and resources for testing, treatment, prevention and care.

In this Ignatian Year, Jesuits and their collaborators desire to see with the eyes of the loving and compassionate Christ what needs to change at both individual and community levels so that our life-giving ministry and engagement may bear fruits that last. Working to end inequalities, end AIDS and end pandemics will take a change of mindset and a loving heart to initiate actions against HIV/AIDS, and to triumph over COVID-19 and other pandemics in our time.

Viewed from the perspective of HIV/AIDS, inequalities take social, economic, and structural forms. Persistent inequalities between women and men significantly weaken efforts to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS and increase vulnerability. It is critical to call to attention to the social and systemic discrimination that is strongly entrenched in almost all our societal structures. Such discrimination denies those living with HIV a fair chance in life, as they perpetually struggle with a combination of shame, blame, isolation, rejection, and the fear of death.

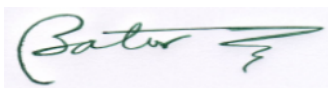
A primary tenet of the Catholic Social Teaching recognises fair access to the goods of the earth and provision for the basic needs of all, including health. Accordingly, every person living with AIDS, whether in rural or urban settings, should have access to prevention, treatment, care and support, irrespective of their gender, race or religion. We cannot talk of mercy, compassion, and social justice when there are over 37 million people living with AIDS in the world, of which 25 million are in Africa – women, men and children who are almost forgotten and face inequality in treatment, access to medical care and dignified existence. A call for a just world is a call for the practice of equality without leaving anyone behind.

As believers, Jesuits and collaborators in Africa share Christ’s mission of protecting and giving abundant life to everyone: “I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full” (John10:10). Over the last two decades, the African Jesuit AIDS Network has strengthened its mission to accompany those infected and affected by HIV through an integrated holistic approach to AIDS in order to eliminate the economic and social inequalities that they face in all spheres of life.

While significant progress has been made in testing, treatment, and prevention, we must remember that HIV is still spreading, and the dynamics keep changing. HIV is still a reality; statistics are glaring in this regard and resources must be committed to combatting HIV/AIDS and Covid-19. We must continue to be creative, innovative, and collaborative. We cannot take the foot off the pedal.

I appeal to all women and men of goodwill in positions of leadership – whether government, relevant organisations, the Church or public leaders – to work together to defeat the enemies of human life, including HIV/AIDS and other vexing diseases, such as malaria and tuberculosis, as well as many other forms of pandemics that threaten life, such as injustice, human trafficking, poverty, gender-based violence and child abuse. In our collective effort to “End inequalities, End AIDS, End pandemics,” let us heed the wise counsel of Pope Francis that “‘every man [or woman] for himself [or herself],’ is not a solution.” We are called to be missionary disciples of the risen Christ, whose mission is to proclaim the Good News to all, break bondage of every kind and give health and healing to all. (Luke 4:18; John 10:10).

I pray, at the intercession of Blessed Anuarite Nengapeta, whose memorial is celebrated today, for all Jesuits and collaborators in Africa and all over the world that your work may bear lasting fruit. As we celebrate the Ignatian Year, may you discover new possibilities, opportunities, and initiatives for defeating HIV/AIDS and all pandemics in collaboration with other public and private actors who hunger for justice, equality, wellbeing, health and peace, along the path to a better future.



December 1<sup>st</sup> 2021.

**Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator SJ**  
*President*

