

## Films open up the lives of Christians affected by HIV

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A NEW government-funded video series produced by Christians living with, or affected by, HIV has been praised by church leaders and health professionals.

The online resource, *Positive Faith*, explores the relationship between HIV and faith. It is due to be launched in London next Thursday, 12 October, by the charity Catholics for AIDS Prevention and Support (CAPS), with grant support from Public Health England, part of its £600,000 HIV Prevention Innovation Fund.



The series has been designed to help churches and schools bolster HIV-prevention efforts, and become more aware of, and welcoming towards, those affected. It is also being promoted as a useful resource for health and social-care professionals.

The director of Hertfordshire Public Health, Professor Jim McManus, a project sponsor and national lead on HIV, said: “If churches are sometimes uncomfortable about HIV, health services still feel uncomfortable about faith. This resource seeks to bridge that gap.”

Short videos of Christians who live with HIV, produced by Kip Loades, explore Christian narratives about healing and acceptance, with the aim of reducing stigma in churches. Accompanying material for small groups offers a “medically accurate and theologically responsible” guide to understanding HIV.

“It is still stunning to me that I can see people with HIV talking about themselves in a church context, on video, without their faces’ being hidden,” Professor McManus said. “That would just not have happened ten years ago.”

One of the contributors, the Most Revd Timothy Radcliffe OP, said: “The challenge for the Church is to bring back people with HIV as full members of the community — not only for what they can receive, but for what they can give. God will not desert them.”

Asked why the project was being launched now, Mr McManus said: “HIV stigma has not gone away, and people often think HIV problems are over because of the new successful treatment. That is not the case.

“While people are living longer thanks to successful treatment, they are suffering from the long-term effects of treatment: stigma, [problems with] coping, and a risk of developing cancers and heart disease. We need this resource.”

The project has been welcomed the Bishop of Southwark, the Rt Revd Christopher Chessun, and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Southwark, the Most Revd Peter Smith, who are due to attend the launch.

“This considerable achievement shows that the language of faith can be as important to good health as medical

terminology, for many people,” Bishop Chessun said. “It also shows us that there are gifts to be brought to the Church from those who sometimes feel excluded.”

Archbishop Smith said that the project demonstrated the importance of “taking faith seriously” in public-health matters. “Spiritual health and physical health are connected. . . We can learn a great deal from people living with HIV. They can bring so much to the Church and to the public-health sector if we are willing to involve them fully.”

Vincent Manning, who chairs CAPS, said: “This is not a project that wags its finger at the individual and sends them off to get tested for HIV; nor is it about blaming the Church for lacking compassion.

“*Positive Faith* is about looking forward and offering practical help that empowers Christian people. CAPS has extensive knowledge and experience to address the issues at the intersection of Christian ministry and HIV with depth and nuance; we intend to save lives.”

Professor McManus concluded: “I have lost people I love to HIV; I have colleagues and friends living with HIV; I have trained ministers on HIV; and I have volunteered in HIV projects. This experience has convinced me that people living with HIV, whether thriving or struggling, have something profound to teach the Church about the call to inclusion, justice, and health.”

Watch the videos [here](#) or visit: [www.caps-uk.org](http://www.caps-uk.org) or [www.aidsmap.com](http://www.aidsmap.com) for more resources.

