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# Launch of groundbreaking resources from CAPS and Positive Faith

🕒 October 13th, 2017

CAPS, HIV, Positive Faith, CAPS, Archbishop Peter Smith

**By:** Jo Siedlecka

Although it is more than 20 years since very effective anti-retroviral drugs were introduced to treat people with HIV, and many churches are likely to have one or more people in their community living with the condition, the subject is not often mentioned at parish level.

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A groundbreaking set of videos and a website from Catholics for AIDS Prevention and Support (CAPS) and Positive Faith, offering advice and pastoral support for anyone concerned about or diagnosed with HIV, was launched at Romero House in Southwark on Wednesday evening.

Archbishop Peter Smith of Southwark and his Anglican counterpart, Bishop Christopher Chessun welcomed people living with HIV, other Christians, theologians and public health sector professionals to the screening and Q& A. Fr Timothy Radcliffe gave a short address.

CAPS worked with film maker Kip Loades, to produce this unique resource, which includes tools for churches and schools to raise awareness of HIV and promote action locally. The resource enables HIV prevention efforts within a church to begin, by providing short videos and training guides for small groups. For those living with HIV, adherence to treatment and medical support is promoted. Christian narratives around healing and God's loving acceptance of everyone encourage churches to become more aware and welcoming, and those worried about HIV to access testing. In the language of faith, Positive Faith aims to reduce stigma in churches and be of pastoral support for Christians living with HIV.

In his address at the launch of Positive Faith, Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP spoke about the example of Jesus who so often embraced people on the margins of society and restored them to community.



He said: "A lot of people with HIV must feel you should be very quiet and not make too much of a fuss - but we believe that you should be at the centre of the party. We believe its Christ who's living with HIV - and therefore he awaits our welcome in all of our brothers and sisters."

Fr Timothy said: "One thing that people often feel is stigma. Its good to remember that Christ was the one that was literally stigmatised - stigmata - marks of the cross - remember that Christ was and is and bears it with us all."

"Things are better than they used to be" he said. "We know that if people stick to their medication, people in the UK live out their natural span, but I guess there can still be a feeling of your defences being a little bit weak, of being vulnerable. So its it good to remember that Christ was the vulnerable man. When they came to arrest him in the garden of Gethsemane, he was unarmed, vulnerable, and so Christ shares the vulnerability of everyone who feels a bit on the edge. So if ever you feel, my defences are a bit down, I don't know how my immune system is going to cope, remember that Christ bears all of that."

He went on: "Now of course living with HIV is much more than just your physical health - especially people vulnerable in other ways.... living well with HIV demands much more than just good health. It demands all sorts of networks of support which CAPs, Positive Catholic and other agencies supply."

"Thomas Aquinas said touch is the most human of all the senses. Touch is so important. Jesus was the person who reached out to touch people physically. So often his ministry began with touch and being unafraid to let himself be touched and hugged - remember you can see and not be seen - hear and not be heard but you can't touch without being touched."

If you're living with HIV you shouldn't just feel that you're welcome. You should feel that you have something special to give, to say a word that's entrusted to you. There's a lovely phrase in Hosea - 'God says I will lead Hosea into the wilderness and there I will speak to her tenderly.'" You too will have words, words of love which we all need to hear. A blessing can be for all of us. Why do we hold back? I suppose irrational fear. The first words of angels always are: 'Do not be afraid'".

Fr Timothy concluded: "Finally in the church we often talk about subsidiarity. Everything must be shared. Every person has their work to do. In HIV we talk about MIPA principal. The Meaningful Involvement of People living with HIV. I think here in this movement - so much was started with the initiative of lay people, carried on by



lay people, that we see what this really means in practice. So in a way we see how the Church should be. And for that we give thanks to CAPS, Positive Catholics and our brother Vincent here. "

Vincent Manning, Chair of CAPS said: "This is not a project that wags its finger at the individual and sends them off to get tested for HIV, neither is it about blaming the church for lacking compassion. Positive Faith is about looking forward and offering practical help that empowers Christian people. As the lead provider of faith based peer support in the UK, 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." Vincent said he expects the project is going to develop and grow as it rolled out.

Archbishop Peter Smith said: "This project demonstrates the importance of taking faith seriously in matters of public health. Faith is an essential aspect of health and wellbeing for many people in many communities. Spiritual health and physical health are connected. The resources will be available to people of all faiths and none, and shows that the churches can be valuable partners in promoting public health and wellbeing in our communities. This project shows that 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."

Bishop Christopher Chessun commented: "The collaboration of Public Health England and the churches in the production of Positive Faith is a considerable achievement. It shows that the language of faith can be as important to good health as medical terminology for many people"

CAPS was one of only 13 agencies awarded a grant by Public Health England (PHE) as part of their HIV Prevention Innovation Fund, with partner sponsorship Hertfordshire Public Health. Jim McManus Director of Hertfordshire Public Health said: "If churches are sometimes uncomfortable about HIV, health services still feel uncomfortable about faith. This resource seeks to bridge that gap."

*\* Inside the Diocese of Southwark are Lambeth and Southwark, the boroughs with the highest prevalence of HIV in the country: 14.6 and 12.7 respectively, per 1000 adults aged 15-59 years, compared to 1.6 per 1,000 nationally (source: HIV in the UK 2016 report: PHE)*

**For more information see: CAPS website [www.caps-uk.org/](http://www.caps-uk.org/)  
Positive Faith on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/Positive-Faith-CAPS-UK-411183222572382/](https://www.facebook.com/Positive-Faith-CAPS-UK-411183222572382/)**



**Positive Faith website: [www.positivefaith.net](http://www.positivefaith.net)**

**There will be more pictures from the evening on ICN's Facebook page.**

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