

Before the service begins, place the world map at the place where people can see it. Light large candles and put in countries of the world with higher HIV and AIDS prevalence.

Words of Welcome

Welcome to our World AIDS Day Service. World AIDS Day is held on December first each year. This is a time when we remember people who have died from AIDS-related illnesses and people who are living with HIV; a time to give thanks for the progress that has been made and to reflect on what still needs to be done. It is an opportunity for people around the world to unite to eradicate AIDS and show support for people living with HIV. It is a time to commit anew to ensuring that no one is left behind.

Call to Worship

Loving and compassionate God, we come before you this World AIDS Day to remember people impacted by HIV and AIDS and reflect on the progress which has been made and what more needs to be done. We are committed to the global goals of Zero New Infections, Zero AIDS Related Deaths, and Zero Stigma and Discrimination. We are making every effort to end AIDS as a public health crisis by the year 2030. We thank you for the progress which has been made to slow, reverse and prevent the spread of HIV, to mitigate its impact on families and communities, and to build welcoming and caring communities for all. This progress is the fruit of the divine gifts of reason, intelligence, good judgment, and spiritual inspiration that you have bestowed upon the millions of scientists, health care providers, mental health and social workers, pastoral caregivers, activists and members of civil society, and people directly impacted and affected by this disease, who are all doing their part to end this pandemic.

Grant us strength Lord to face the many challenges that confront us on our journey as HIV & AIDS continues to challenge us to break down barriers between “us” and “them” and our judgment that leads to stigmatization, discrimination and the violation of human rights. Lord help us to recognize the need to examine our spiritual life, the practice in our attitude responding to Key Affected Population, and to ensure fuller participation of brothers and sisters who are living with HIV & AIDS (BROSLIH) in the life of our faithfulness.

We pray for our brothers and sisters who live with HIV and AIDS and at the same time seek their active participation in the life of the interfaith community, which will enrich our spiritual experience and bridge the gap between our religious teachings and the realities on the ground. AMEN.

Gathering song of your choice

Stories and Reflection

Reader 1: My name is Thawdar Htun and I am 36 years old, I live in Yangon, Myanmar. I am now working as Co-leader of Myanmar Positive Christian Fellowship (MPCF). And I am also serving at Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC), as an outreach worker/ trainer of HIV/AIDS care and prevention program. I finished Bachelor of Science in Physics in 2003, which was just after I came to know that I had tested HIV positive. I regularly shared my life experiences on why I wanted to live even after I came to know that I am HIV positive. I shared my vision. When I disclosed my status, I felt as if I had attained my freedom. I came to see life from the other side.

I have overcome my fears and now I have an optimistic outlook. My positive status is my morale booster to help others who may be as ignorant as I was when I came to know that I am positive. I committed myself to contribute my life, time, and experiences to those who are living with HIV in Myanmar till the end of my life. I am always reminded of this proverb “One day, all people will be gone from human society without the things that belonged to them. They will be remembered not in terms of their possessions and positions in life but their manner and relationship with each other as they live their lives”.

Reader 2: My name is ‘GBI’. I am a Catholic Priest from India, born on 4th July, 1964. I hail from a small village and after Middle School education, at the age 13, I joined the seminary aspiring to become a priest. I am a graduate in history and also hold a Master’s degree in Social Work, both from Loyola College, Chennai, but lived with the virus in my body for more than 5 years. I am unable to knock at the door of the Catholic Church. All I speak goes unheard. I have no priest-friends or friends in society.

There are many more stigmatizing attitudes and behaviors to which I am being exposed to in the church, till today. It underlines the false assumption that HIV infection is God’s punishment for disobedience to God’s law, irrespective of how the virus was contracted. The struggle against HIV and AIDS will never succeed without addressing stigma. Stigma is more lethal than the virus. It not only kills but it also perpetuates its own particular sort of emotional suffering.

Many a times, I was desperate, finding no meaning in life. A priest told me, “If we live, we should live with dignity and if we die, we must die with dignity. You have lost both.” At times, I feel I should die. My priesthood has become a curse to me. My fear of disclosing my status to family members still continues.

I stand alone in the Indian Catholic community in fighting against stigma and discrimination. It is true that the church does reach out to those people living with the virus, but remains insensitive in terms of accepting a priest that lives with the virus. It is my personal experience that stigma continues to be a challenging obstacle to all the efforts to treat the virus and people living with the virus. It is because the “Church which thinks holy, has no place for unholy people.” I do not know when the Catholic Church will wake up and accept reality. But the day it accepts reality, will be the day I must say, “Jesus is my Savior”.

Reader 3: In the presence of an ordained pastor, me, Niken and Rio from Indonesia – pledged our marriage vows in front of God to be husband and wife in good times and bad. It was the most beautiful and most memorable day in my life. We were blessed with a beautiful daughter. We praised the Lord and named her Tasya.

After about four months, my daughter fell ill. At first we thought it wasn’t a big deal, and we brought her to a hospital where she was examined by a doctor. She recovered, but another illness followed. I started to worry about Tasya’s condition. After a discussion with my husband, we decided to take Tasya to a specialist. The doctor suggested that Tasya take a blood test. The result showed that our daughter was HIV positive. The doctor recommended that my husband and I get tested for HIV, and found that we were both HIV positive. I was shocked and devastated, because our happiness didn’t last long, and we were tested by God.

Several months later, at almost the same time my husband and I fell ill, and we took anti-retroviral treatment (ART). Unfortunately, my husband could not be saved because of complication from an HIV-related illness. After my husband passed away, I decided to tell my husband’s family what really happened, hoping that they would understand and keep supporting me and Tasya. But on the contrary, they avoided us and we were almost not acknowledged, except for my husband’s youngest sibling who still cared about our life. The situation made me fall into deep misery. When I felt weaker and almost desperate, only Tasya uplifted me and gave me a reason to live.

Tasya is now nine years old and in the third grade. Tasya once asked why she was treated differently from the other children by her grandparents and our family. At that time she just ran and asked me to hug her. I hugged and caressed her and I tried to smile, although inside I cried. Every time I prayed, I asked God to give me strength in facing the test of life. I felt God is always helping me and Tasya to live our life. Sometimes my friends asked how Tasya and I are still strong. I just answer, “I’m strong because of Tasya, and Tasya because of me. I’m not giving up. To keep our health, we routinely take ART, and above all I surrender everything to God.” I feel assured of God’s help and I am motivated to live positively.

(Stories taken from book “Journey of Life”, edited by Alphinus Kambodji & Susan Jacob, published by CCA 2013)

Readings: *(Please, remain standing for the readings)*

Luke 8: 42b -48

As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. And a woman was there she had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped. "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you." But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me." Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

Reflection:

What do we know about this woman?

She was sick and had a bleeding condition, and the issue had continued for twelve years. That's a very long time. She had spent all her money on treatments from many doctors, and nothing had helped; in fact, the blood issue had only grown worse (*see Mark 5:25-26*). She was Stigmatized: We also know that Jewish Law declared her to be ceremonially unclean due to her bleeding issue (*Leviticus 15:25-27*). This meant that she would not have been permitted to enter the temple for Jewish religious ceremonies. According to the Law, anything or anyone she touched became unclean as well.

Desperate: The fact that she was in the crowd pressing around Jesus means that each person who bumped into her would have become unclean, too—including Jesus. But, after twelve years of suffering, she was obviously desperate for a miracle.

What kind of faith does the woman show?

Matthew 9:21; Mark 5:28; Luke 8:47

"When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, 'If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed'".

The woman's genuine faith in touching Jesus' clothing is from a human standpoint, for, in reality, the power to heal is in Christ Himself (*Mark 5:30-34*). In touching Him, she is not thinking of His merciful and compassionate will, but of a physical healing power passing from His body to His clothing and then to the hand that touched it. She has a material conception of His healing power, a confidence that something magical flows through His clothes.

God doesn't require us to have unshakable, unwavering, moving mountains kind of faith in order to work miracles in our lives.

Sometimes, just like the woman with the issue of blood all we need to do is have enough faith to just barely touch the hem of Christ's garment. If we can do that, then He can use His miraculous power on our behalf.

Song:

“In Moments Like These”

In moments like these, I sing out a song; I sing out a love song to Jesus
In moments like these, I lift up my hands; I lift up my hands to the Lord,
Singing I love you Lord, Singing, I love you Lord,
Singing, I love you.....Lord, I love you.

Prayer of Confession:

Before Prayer, all participants light small red candles and place them in places that symbolize 'Red Ribbon' to remember our friends, brothers or sisters who are living with HIV.

All: I am somebody, I have the right to live.

Women: I may be HIV positive, But I have the right to essential medicine.

Men: I may be a prostitute, or a drug addict, But I am accepted by God.

Women: I may be an infected single mother, But I have a right to treatment.

All: I am God's child.

Men: I may be poor, but I have a right to healthy food and clean water.

Women: I may be different from you, but I have a right to be safe.

Men: I may be dying, but I have a right to receive care and support.

All: I am God's child. I can raise my head. I can work for justice. I may be without my legs, but with God, I can stand tall, Because my redemption is near. I am somebody. We are all God's children. We all have a right to live.

(Prayer prepared by Grace Moon – CCA)

Song

Kyrie eleison (Lord, have mercy) or song of choice

Benediction

All: Gracious and loving God, you are the fountain of life, the cleansing spring and the well that never dries up. Forgive us for falling short of our calling to be agents of healing – when we manifest instead our brokenness, division, prejudice and pride. Look kindly on our shortcomings and heal our infirmities of body and spirit. Refresh us by your Holy Spirit that we may strive to become agents of your healing touch for your world. Amen.

(World AIDS Day 2015 Liturgy of CCA, prepared by Alphinus Kambodji)