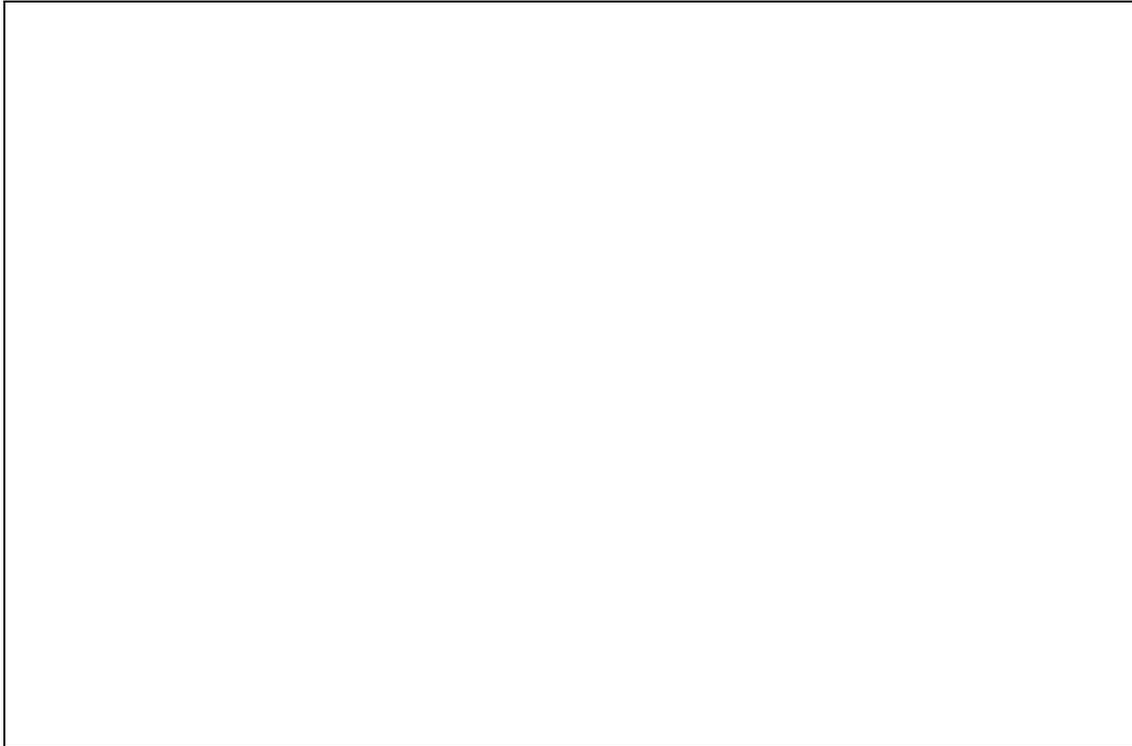


Brazil: the big picture

Faith leaders and HIV: report 4 of 4, 2010



Siân Curry / CIO / Latin America + Caribbean

Information contained in this report should not be published either internally or externally without being signed off by the CIU/LAC team



We believe in life before death

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Summary

Key theme: HIV and faith leaders

SFA: HIV, strengthening the movement

For many people living with HIV, fear, rejection and stigma are still the norm.

Faith leaders have a key role to play in rejecting stigma and in championing HIV prevention and care. Because they hold positions of trust and authority, every religious leader has the potential to influence dozens, hundreds or even thousands of others.

Our partner Koinonia trains religious leaders in HIV awareness. With support from Christian Aid, Koinonia is now setting up the Brazilian branch of INERELA+, the International Network of Religious Leaders Living With or Affected by HIV.

'Religious institutions can either reinforce prejudice and discrimination, or they can fight against it.' Anivaldo Pandilha, Koinonia

Hundreds reach thousands



With CA support, Koinonia has trained more than 200 religious leaders in HIV awareness, so they can champion HIV prevention and care among their 20,000 followers.

Pai Alessandro is a Candomblé Spirit Father who welcomes about 120 people to his house of worship every fortnight. After training from Koinonia, Pai Alessandro now regularly speaks publicly about HIV, and keeps

condoms in the storeroom for ease of distribution. He also ensures that, in ceremonies that involve skin-cutting, each participant has a separate razor.

Watch [this](#) audio-slideshow, featuring faith leaders trained by Koinonia. [Now also live on CA website here.](#)

São Paulo marks World AIDS Day



With 20 million residents, São Paulo is the second largest city in the world. From 2009 onwards, the city officially marks World AIDS Day each year.

Koinonia invited São Paulo city council to join and support their World AIDS Day activities in 2008. The experience was so positive that the council decided to make World AIDS Day one of just five annual events in the city calendar from 2009 onwards.

This decision will help ensure that vital HIV messages reach hundreds of thousands of people.

Christian Aid in Brazil

At 35 times the size of the UK, Brazil is, geographically, the biggest country that Christian Aid works in. It is one of the world's largest economies, yet one of the world's most unequal countries. Brazil has achieved the astonishing and seemingly contradictory feat of making the global top ten for both wealth *and* inequality¹.

In a nation that is, overall, richer than Canada or Australia², there is no need for hunger. Poverty here is all about power – or the lack of it. Brazil's wealth and infrastructure could allow for rapid, transformational change, if only the political will were there.

Christian Aid's work here, rooted in grassroots movements, focuses on building this political will, and changing the systems and structures that keep more than 40 million Brazilians trapped in poverty in a land of plenty.

Despite the size of the challenge, our partners are making inspiring progress, together claiming successes which are benefiting thousands or even millions of people – as illustrated in this report. Partners' work here focuses on two main issues:

- ensuring a fairer distribution of Brazil's vast resources – including land
- helping the poorest and least powerful to understand and claim their rights, as laid out in Brazil's laws and constitution

Within this framework, our priorities include:

- building inter-faith networks to lobby for social change
- increased political voice and representation for the poorest
- budget monitoring, anti-corruption work and financial transparency
- the rights of indigenous people, quilombolas³ and vulnerable women
- pressuring the government to fulfil its commitment to land reform
- changing the unfair tax system where the poorest pay most
- HIV awareness and challenging discrimination

'I am not interested in picking up crumbs of compassion thrown from the table of someone who considers himself my master. I want the full menu of rights.'

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, South Africa

Other 2010 communications reports:

- [2010 Brazil CIU Amazon report](#) (land for Quilombola people in the Amazon)
- [2010 Brazil CIU Land Money Power report](#) (changing systems and structures)
- [2010 Brazil CIU Metropolis report](#) (urban poverty/homelessness in São Paulo)

¹ 10th richest country in the World (IMF figures 2009), 10th most unequal country in the world (Gini index, UN human development report 2009)

² In terms of overall GDP. Obviously Canada and Australia have a much higher GDP per capita.

³ Quilombola people are the descendants of escaped slaves who live in the Amazon

Afro-Brazilian faiths

Slavery and power

Brazil was the main 'importer' of the Atlantic slave trade, receiving about four million slaves – more than a third of all those transported across the ocean⁴.

Slavery persisted in Brazil for well over 300 years, and has had a huge impact on the country's population and social structure. Today, **Brazil is the second most populous black nation in the world**. Only Nigeria has a larger black population. Yet, even now, few black people hold positions of power.

Most slaves ended up working on plantations in Brazil's north-east, which remains by far the poorest area of the country.



Religion

Candomblé and Umbanda are Afro-Brazilian religions, formed from traditional African beliefs and, for protection, linked to the symbols and saints of Catholicism.

Candomblé, which has around two million followers, means 'dance in honour of the gods' and Umbanda, with

around half a million followers, means 'the art of healing'.

Both believe in one supreme God but worship intermediate spirits – often linked to Catholic saints – and have a strong reverence for nature. There are several variations of both faiths. Ceremonies involve chants, drumming, dancing and communion with ancestors and spirits known as Orixá, who enter some worshippers' bodies, leaving them in a trance-like state.

The ceremonies can last for many hours, as they depend on when the ancestors or spirits choose to leave. After the ceremony, worshippers eat and socialise together. There is a strong sense of community, warmth and welcome.

Throughout the colonial era, followers of these faiths were violently persecuted – participation in ceremonies was often punished by whipping. Persecution continued almost to the present day, until a law requiring police permission to hold public ceremonies was scrapped in the 1970s.

However, there is still widespread discrimination against people who practise these faiths, which are traditionally – but no longer exclusively – associated with poor, black Brazilians

To find out more about Candomblé beliefs click [here](#).

⁴ [IBGE \(Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics\), 2000](#)

HIV in Brazil

There are 730, 000 people in Brazil living with HIV (UNAIDS 2008 figures). Although these figures are high, this is **only half the number** that was predicted 10 years ago. This is a great success for Brazilian government's national AIDS programme, which Christian Aid partners such as GAPA-Bahia contributed to developing.

In 1991, Brazil and South Africa both had HIV prevalence rates of just over one per cent of the population. Today, Brazil has a rate of 0.6 per cent, while South Africa's, by contrast, stands at 18 per cent.

Unlike in most African countries, Brazil's HIV epidemic is **not** generalised and widespread among all sectors of society. This is, of course, extremely positive – but it also creates its own specific challenges in supporting those who are living with HIV, and in reaching those most at risk with practical information about prevention.

Although anyone can contract HIV, those most vulnerable to the virus in Brazil are often those who are already marginalised and excluded – such as gay men, injecting drug users, migrants, sex workers and poor women. Partly because of this, the stigma associated with HIV remains very high.

In countries with much higher prevalence rates, the sheer scale of the problem has forced faith leaders to address HIV as a mainstream issue. But in Brazil, many faith leaders remain reluctant to engage with an issue that is often perceived to 1) affect only those at the margins of society, and 2) be linked to questions of sexuality.



Unlike in Africa, there are currently (Jan 2010) **no senior religious leaders in Latin America or the Caribbean who are openly living with HIV.**

[Ideraldo Beltrame](#), an Anglican lay minister with Holy Trinity Parish in São Paulo, is one of the very few religious figures on the whole continent who is open about being HIV positive.

Christian Aid believes that [faith leaders in Brazil](#), as elsewhere, have a key role to play in HIV prevention and care, and in reducing stigma towards the hundreds of thousands of Brazilian citizens who are living with the virus.

See feature + audio-slideshow on CA website [here](#)

The partner, projects and activities

The partner

[Koinonia](#), meaning 'fellowship', is a national organisation that aims to strengthen joint work among ecumenical agencies, collaborating rather than competing⁵.

It focuses on themes that the ecumenical world finds difficult to deal with, such as HIV and AIDS, inter-religious dialogue and racism, and often draws on human rights principles. Koinonia actively includes Afro-Brazilian faiths in its activities.

The project

Christian Aid has funded Koinonia's HIV awareness work with faith leaders since 2003. So far, Koinonia has trained more than 200 religious leaders from various Christian, Candomblé and Umbanda traditions. Assuming that each leader can reach and influence about 100 worshippers, this training has so far helped carry vital HIV prevention and care messages to about **20,000 people**.

Watch [this](#) audio-slideshow, featuring faith leaders trained by Koinonia.

With funding from DFID, Christian Aid is now supporting⁶ Koinonia to oversee the establishment of the Brazilian branch of [INERELA+](#), the international network of religious leaders living with or affected by HIV. INERELA+ was founded in 2003 in Uganda, with support from Christian Aid. It was initially the African network of religious leaders, and had just three members. It now has more than 3,500 members, and is expanding worldwide.

The network provides fellowship, mutual support and empowerment for members, as well as engaging in advocacy and support activities for marginalised groups most vulnerable to HIV infection, and for people living with HIV.

The activities

Koinonia organises meetings, retreats, workshops and HIV training sessions (focusing on the [SAVE approach](#)) with religious leaders from a range of faiths. In 2010/11 there will be a learning exchange between Brazil and Haiti, focusing on how the marginalisation of Candomblé and Voudou followers makes them more vulnerable to HIV.



⁵ In 2008/09, Christian Aid funded Koinonia to set up a [web portal](#) to enable ecumenical organisations throughout Latin America and the Caribbean to share news, research and information more easily.

⁶ This grant is for £41,000 over 2 years (0910 – 1011). This comprises GBP 23, 000, 00 for a year 1, and then commitment in principle for GBP 18, 000, 00 for a year 2. It is a low risk project, funded by DfID, code 9DF0056

Faith leaders' quotes on HIV

All these leaders have either received Koinonia HIV training, or are themselves involved in delivering that training (Anivaldo and Ideraldo).

'Religious institutions can either reinforce prejudice and discrimination, or they can fight against it.' **Anivaldo Padilha, Koinonia ecumenical network**

'In Candomblé the priest has a very broad social role... When we speak our voices carry a lot of weight and people listen. So we have a big responsibility to get our facts right.' **Pai Alessandro, Candomblé Spirit Father**

'There is a lot of prejudice and ignorance around HIV. Umbanda teaches that it is a human duty to seek knowledge and make your decisions based on knowledge, not ignorance.' **Mãe Denise D'Yausã, Umbanda leader**

'The most important thing to remember is that the person beside you is worth the same as you, whatever their situation.' **Pai Atavalpa de Figueiredo, Candomblé Spirit Father**

'Using religious language and my own source of faith – the Bible – we deconstruct those passages that people use to justify stigma and show people a new way to read them.'

Revd. Arthur Cavalcante, Holy Trinity Church, São Paulo



'Here in Brazil people living with HIV have the health services they need, but they're all very technical. And life is more than a mere technicality, there's a spiritual dimension too. People need to know that they are precious in God's eyes.' **Ideraldo Beltrame, Anglican lay preacher living with HIV**

'Standing in solidarity with those who suffer is not an option for us, it is part of the essence of being Christian... Jesus never asked any questions. He just helped those who came to him' **Anivaldo Pandilha, Koinonia ecumenical network**

'Leading is not about sitting down talking at people, it is about standing with them.' **Mãe Denise D'Yausã, Umbanda leader**

'I feel welcome here. People know I'm HIV positive, but they also know that they can receive communion from my hands.' **Ideraldo Beltrame, Anglican lay preacher living with HIV**

Photos and audio-visual materials



Description Dancers and worshippers at a Candomblé ceremony

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- Link to [all Koinonia photos](#)

Audio-slideshow: [Brazil: faith leaders and HIV](#)

(Music recorded during a service at Holy Trinity Parish, where Artúr and Ideraldo were serving)

This audio-slideshow is now also live on the CA website [here](#).

Appendix 1: Case study for DFID PPA reporting

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Title of Case Study: | Faith leaders raising awareness of HIV in São Paulo city and state |
|-----------------------------|--|

| | |
|---|--|
| 1. PPA partner name | Christian Aid/Koinonia |
| 3. Name of partners where appropriate (UK, other PPAs, local, etc) | Christian Aid, Koinonia, São Paulo city & Paulo state government |
| 4. What does this case study demonstrate (impact, poverty reduction angle, voice and accountability, etc) | Effective HIV awareness raising with an leaders in São Paulo, Brazil (the second the world) – resulting in the city adopting Day as an official event in the city calendar |
| 5. Which strategic objective(s) does this case study cover? | <div data-bbox="582 860 1125 2000" style="background-color: black; width: 100%; height: 100%;"></div> <p>Objective: Faith leaders and networks providing evidence based non-stigmatising leadership on HIV at global and local levels</p> <p>Indicator: By 2011, 3,600 trained faith leaders will be providing leadership and advocating for effective, evidence based HIV prevention, treatment, care and support programmes in at least 10 countries</p> |

6. Summary of achievements

(250 words)

Since 2003, the ecumenical agency Koinonia has trained 200 faith leaders in HIV awareness. These leaders include Anglican, Pentecostal, Candomblé and Umbanda leaders.

With an average following of about 100, these leaders are now reaching about 20,000 people. Many leaders are also active in spreading awareness outside their faith context, targeting schools and community groups in particular.

The independent Presbyterian, Methodist and Catholic churches in Brazil have all now established programmes on HIV, and the Anglican Church is following suit.

Particular success: For the last three years, Koinonia has arranged events to mark World AIDS Day in the city of São Paulo.

Last year (2008), Koinonia approached the city council and invited them to be involved. The council agreed, providing tents in the main city square and a lunch for participants.

As a direct result of Koinonia's work building relationships and understanding with the city council, their positive experience at last year's event and their own initiative, the city council has decided that the city will have its own World AIDS Day every year from now on. The first World AIDS Day 2009 will be the first.

The new World AIDS Day event will be an annual metropolitan event of this nature, including the celebrations to mark the founding of the city, an arts weekend, a sports weekend and a parade.

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p>7. What is the actual impact demonstrated by this case study – who are the beneficiaries/ what has changed?</p> <p><i>(100 words)</i></p> | <p>The immediate beneficiaries are the faith leaders themselves and their followers, who can now benefit from 1) a non-stigmatising welcome and support if they are living with HIV, 2) safer practices in those religions with ceremonies which involve skin-cutting and 3) evidence-based prevention information, including about condom use.</p> <p>The indirect beneficiaries are the people of São Paulo – the largest city in South America and second largest in the world, with a population of around 20 million.</p> <p>By elevating World AIDS Day to be one of the five annual city events, the council has ensured a higher profile for HIV and provided a key platform for awareness work for years to come.</p> | |
| <p>8. What are the long term benefits?</p> <p><i>(100 words)</i></p> | | <p>World AIDS Day celebrations are now a fixture in the São Paulo calendar. This enshrines the issue with long-term significance for the city.</p> <p>The annual gay parade in São Paulo now attracts millions of people. The World AIDS Day parade, which first happened in 2009, has grown to reach increasingly large audiences year on year.</p> |

| | |
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| | |
| <p>10. If you were to do this again, what would you change and why?</p> <p>(100 words) □ It has been harder to attract older male faith leaders to the initial workshops. Attendees have been mostly women and youth. Koinonia thinks this is likely to be because men are generally less concerned about health issues than women – both on behalf of themselves and others.</p> <p>It has been harder to attract older male faith leaders to the initial workshops. Attendees have been mostly women and youth. Koinonia thinks this is likely to be because men are generally less concerned about health issues than women – both on behalf of themselves and others.</p> <p>If they were to do this again, Koinonia would differentiate their target audiences more clearly and offer specific entry-level sessions targeted at male faith leaders.</p> | <p>□ What, if any, innovative aspects are by this case study?</p> <p>11. What, if any, innovative aspects are demonstrated by this case study?</p> <p>(100 words)</p> |

13. Please supply photographs as jpeg attachments, stating who/what the photographs show

[Koinonia photos](#) with full captions on CA online image library (request jpegs from photo unit)

[Brazil: faith leaders and HIV audio-slideshow on Youtube](#)

Further information if necessary

14. Further information if necessary

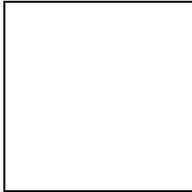
Assumptions / Additional Information

Author: Sian Curry
Date: 30 December 2009

Appendix 2: verbatim interviews

Pai Alessandro (35)

Candomblé spirit name: Tata Kewala Simbe (Father Warrior Hunter from the Rivers).



[6007121](#)

Pai Alessandro (Father Alessandro) is a Candomblé priest and Spirit Father who welcomes about 120 people to his house of worship every fortnight. After training from Koinonia, Pai Alessandro now regularly speaks publicly about HIV, and keeps condoms in the storeroom for ease of distribution. He also ensures that, in ceremonies that involve skin-cutting, each participant has a separate razor.

Why he decided to take part in Koinonia's training

A priest has to care for people's physical health as well as their spiritual health. My quest was to find out what I ought to know to be a good priest, how I should care for and support someone within my congregation who is HIV positive.

What he learnt

We learnt about anti-retroviral medicines. We use herbs a lot in Candomblé but I hadn't heard of this medicine before, now I have a lot of respect for it.

In our ceremonies, for example when we are welcoming someone into our faith, we sometimes cut the skin with a razor. I learnt how important it was not to share the razor. Even if you wash it is isn't sterilised.

I learned that you shouldn't leave out someone living with HIV, you should make them feel welcome. It is important not to be prejudiced.

How he has used that knowledge

I've spoken about it a lot in my house [of worship]. I've handed out condoms. I have five boxes of condoms in the storeroom. I tell people that they should take them because they should take care of themselves. Our body is our temple.

People were surprised to see my giving out condoms. They said 'oh not me, I don't need them, I'm not at risk.' But one of the things I learnt was that

everyone can be at risk. HIV is an epidemic, knocking at everyone's door.

The spiritual and the physical are linked, but it is important that people don't think they can come here to be cured. We, as priests, have a responsibility to know what is spiritual and what is physical. This is a physical illness.

Why it is important for Candomblé leaders to know about HIV

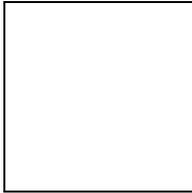
It's a vital responsibility to know about HIV. It's important because we cut people's skin in some ceremonies and if we use the same razor we could transmit HIV. And we need to know how to react when we have an HIV positive person in our house, how to support them. We don't ask who people are or where they come from, we attend anyone who enters our house.

A Candomblé house is different from a church. A church has its norms and its ways of doing things, and a Candomblé house has different traditions. A Candomblé house is like an African village.

In Candomblé the priest has a very broad social role. People turn to us for advice and guidance about everything. A Candomblé priest acts as a complete guide for someone's life. We can speak about anything – health, career, marriage, sex – and when we speak our voices carry a lot of weight and people listen. So we have a big responsibility to get our facts right.

Denise de Siqueira Garcia

Umbanda name: Mãe (Mother) Denise D'Yausã



[6007115](#)

Mãe Denise (second from right) is an Umbanda leader who lost her brother to AIDS. After attending Koinonia workshops she now raises awareness of the virus among schools, scout groups and other Umbanda followers. People wear white for Umbanda ceremonies, which have a strong focus on communion with the ancestors. Every week, more than 70 people come to worship in the back yard of Mãe Denise's house.

Why she decided to take part in Koinonia's training

My brother died of AIDS, so when they invited me to come to their training sessions, I already had personal knowledge of the subject. **When someone is seriously ill, the whole family is ill. It affects everyone and it is very hard.**

When my brother was sick, my mum used to wash her hands with disinfectant after touching him, and people wouldn't sit on his bed. I wanted to know more about the illness and the treatment, so I did my own research.

Umbanda teaches that you never know everything and that you should always continue seeking knowledge and improvement.

What she learnt at the Koinonia workshops

Because of my personal experience I already knew some things – like I knew that it is fine to touch someone who is HIV positive.

But I learnt new things too, for example I found out about herbal teas. We use herbs a lot in Umbanda, but when someone is taking anti-retrovirals some of these herbal teas can increase the risk of the person developing hepatitis. I took that knowledge home with me.

In the workshops spoke a lot about the respect we have for other human beings. We spoke about love, respect, brotherhood and union. We all have a little bit of God in us.

One of the things that came out of it was a better relationship between the different faith leaders there. I didn't know Pai Alessandro before, and I had

had a wrong opinion of Candomblé. I was prejudiced and I was wrong. I am not better than anyone else.

How she has used her knowledge of HIV

I work with Delurdes from the health ministry⁷. I'm a scout leader and I've taken this info to the scout groups, and also into schools, and I've spoken about it in my house of worship.

When I spoke to the scouts we invited the parents to come too. People listened but in general people resist talking about sex even more than they resist talking about drugs, as if sex were a sin. It's easier to talk about drugs than sex. I didn't expect it. The scout group is made up of educated middle class people but this silence still exists.

Why it is important for Umbanda leaders to know about HIV

There is a lot of prejudice and ignorance around HIV. Umbanda teaches that it is a human duty to seek knowledge and make your decisions based on knowledge, not ignorance.

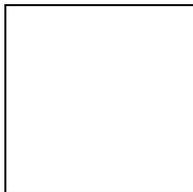
As a faith leader I feel a great responsibility and great weight on my shoulders. **Leading is not about sitting down talking at people, it is about standing with them.**

When people come seeking support from their leader we help psychologically and spiritually. We believe in spiritual balance, we believe that balance leads to a better life. My brother, when he was sick, lost that balance. He had his moments of weakness and despair. We have to help people rediscover the balance. **Medicine can't solve everything. It has to go hand in hand with the spiritual.**

And we need to show people the risks they are taking. Your body is a sacred temple given to you by God, you have to respect it.

⁷ Mãe Denise is part of the municipal forum on 'VHI and religion'

Revd. Artúr Cavalcante



[6007153](#)

Revd. Artúr (right) is the vicar at Holy Trinity Church, São Paulo. The parish won São Paulo state's 2009 diversity award, in recognition of the way that it welcomes gay people and people living with HIV into the church – both as members of the congregation and as leaders within the church.

Artúr has had HIV training from Koinonia, and has since co-written a [Creed for a World Without AIDS](#).

Role of his church in relation to HIV

As part of the Anglican Church I hold a position of trust in relation to my congregation. I have the opportunity to get close to and influence people, because of my role.

The authority I hold is not because of me, Artúr, as an individual, but because of my position as a vicar. I use this authority to help get rid of myths about sexuality, illness and other taboos. My role is a pastoral one. It's not about imposing my view but about talking.

There are lots of preconceptions round HIV, it's a subject loaded with stigma. **Using religious language and my own source of faith – the bible – we deconstruct those passages that people use to justify stigma and show people a new way of reading them.** And we highlight other texts which point to our duty to welcome and support those who are excluded.

My church is in the centre of São Paulo, it's a huge metropolis. Our parish is made up of different people – traditional families and also people who are traditionally excluded.

We've developed a [Creed](#) for a World without AIDS and have put it up on our [website](#).

The [diversity award](#) that the church won in August 2009

In 2008 the São Paulo state government invited entities who work on including people who are traditionally excluded, such as women and people

who are black, disabled or gay, to apply for its award for diversity in the workplace. The award was open to the whole state⁸.

Our application was based on sexual diversity – the fact that gay people are welcome here, and can hold leadership posts within our church – and also on the way that we are also open to people living with HIV taking on leadership posts. If someone has the capacity to lead, then of course they can lead.

Support from Koinonia

Koinonia are important in helping us articulate our work on HIV. They provide materials on the theme of AIDS and the Church, and they provide training.

Sometimes I come across complex things that I can't work out alone, and they help me. In my pastoral role, when I'm supporting someone living with HIV and I need information, I can ask them. I go to Ester⁹.

The role of INERELA

We already have some church leaders who are living with the virus, and INERELA provides support for those leaders.

⁸ São Paulo state is bigger than the UK (250,00 km²) and has about 2/3 of the UK population (42 mill).

⁹ Koinonia staff member

A Creed for a World without AIDS

This creed was co-written by Revd. Artúr Cavalcante, following HIV training from Koinonia.

We believe and proclaim the Good News of the Gospel: that God sent Jesus Christ to love and welcome into his kingdom all people who are infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. The Son of God, when he was man, experienced his own suffering, and took onto his own shoulders the suffering of the world, he understood what it was like to be discriminated against and, for that reason, he can welcome, unconditionally, his brothers and sisters.

We baptise, teach and nurture our faithful, irrespective of their status, whether they are positive or negative, because living with HIV/AIDS is not a punishment from God and is also no reason to turn people away from communion in the Church. We include all people in our services, guaranteeing them, unreservedly, full access to the Holy Sacraments.

We serve the needy with love, seeking to hear their stories, bring them comfort in their pains, sufferings and daily struggles, showing always that hope exists, even when facing HIV/AIDS. The life of a person living with HIV is not focused on the virus or the illness, but on the person, filled with the Holy Spirit. That person must be treated with dignity, respect and justice, with their rights assured.

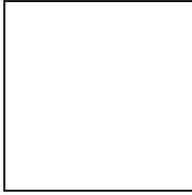
We fight for the transformation of unfair social structures, responsible for the world's HIV pandemic. We reject the idea that AIDS is a moral or religious problem; it is a health problem and must be treated as such by society and by the government. Preconceived and discriminatory religious pronouncements regarding people living with HIV risk increasing the spread of the illness, by creating fragile environments where the virus can be transmitted more easily.

We strive to safeguard the integrity of life in all its forms, irrespective of creed, gender, sexual orientation, race or ethnic group and social class. Thus we support the use of a condom in all sexual relationships and free access to medicines to treat the illness, and we support the search for an affective and accessible vaccine against this virus. We believe that pronouncements and religious practices which reject the prevention of AIDS, and those which suggest that AIDS can be cured by abandoning medical treatment, are sins against God.

Thus we affirm our hope and belief, inspired by the Holy Trinity, that it is possible for us to build a world without AIDS.
AMEN¹⁰

¹⁰ 'A Creed for a World without AIDS' is inspired by the Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Consultative Council. **Authors:** Revd Arthur Cavalcante, Anglican Parish of the Holy Trinity, São Paulo and Sra. Ilcélia A Soares-leiga, Anglican Diocese of Recife + HIV activist with the NGO Espaço Vida-EVida.

Ideraldo Luíz Beltrame (45)



[6007154](#), [6007155](#)

Ideraldo has been living with HIV for 20 years. He is a lay preacher with Holy Trinity Anglican Church in São Paulo, and helps Koinonia provide HIV awareness training for other religious leaders from a range of faiths. Ideraldo is also a sociologist and Doctor of Public Health at São Paulo University.

With support from DFID, Christian Aid and Koinonia, Ideraldo is helping establish the Brazilian section of INERELA+, the international network of religious leaders living with or affected by HIV. He is also the Latin American representative on the INERELA board.

The church's role in relation to HIV

Here in the community our main priority is to maintain a dialogue about prevention, and to get rid of stigma – in particular the notion that AIDS is proof of sin. We need to revisit this whole notion of sin and sexuality. We need to remember that sex is both human and divine.

We stick very closely to the liturgy, and highlight words of faith that encourage the inclusion of people who are HIV positive. We create a discourse using words of faith.

It's about building a liturgy of inclusion, and guaranteeing that people who are HIV positive know that, in our church, they don't need to be afraid of talking about it, and that they can even be leaders.

I feel welcome here. People know I'm HIV positive, but they also know that they can receive communion from my hands. But I don't want this to be personal, I don't want it to be just because they know me as an individual, but because of a genuine conviction about relating to people living with HIV. I don't want people to say 'those people are all awful, except Ideraldo, he's alright'.

People who have AIDS are often the people who are already the most vulnerable – like homeless people, the poorest, transvestites.

The unique thing that religious leaders have to offer

People living with HIV may have their doctor and they may have a psychologist. As I religious leader I have a different thing to offer. I want to hear their spiritual struggles.

Here in Brazil people living with HIV have the health services they need, but they're all very technical, and life is more than a mere technicality. There's a spiritual dimension too. People need to know that they are precious in God's eyes. They need to be loved, touched and valued.

On talking openly about living with HIV

It still makes me feel tense. When I speak about it, it reminds me that I'm sick. But I feel well, I have support, I have a doctor, I have love in my life, I'm at peace with God.

On being a church leader living with HIV

INERELA changed my vision. I've always worked with young people in the church, and now I can tell young people that they have the full right to participate fully in their church, as a leader as well as a worshipper. This has been a long fight – the next step in the chain of history of women's ordination, the ordination of gay people and now the ordination of people living with HIV.

Before, every time I looked at the cross I felt ashamed, I felt I could no longer be with God. Now I feel proud to put on my robes and do God's service. I like serving. I want to do missionary work.

When he was first diagnosed

I found out I was HIV positive 20 years ago. My only worry was for my partner not to have it. I thought 'I'm strong, I can handle it, but I don't want him to suffer.' Thankfully he was negative. But later, after we had separated, he became positive anyway. He came to me then, and cried on my shoulder.

The first thing I thought was that I wanted my mum. I was at the point of starting university and I wanted to run away. **No-one told me that this was a virus, just like flu is a virus, and that I should keep living my life. I wish I'd known that.** People really need to hear this, and you need someone to tell you.

But overall I didn't want to hear things, I wanted to be heard. I wanted people to offer me their shoulder.

Pai Atavalpa de Figueiredo

Candomblé spirit name: Tato Cajalacy

Pai Atavalpa has received HIV training from Koinonia.

Your book is the bible. Our book is the sun, wind, rain, water, earth and leaves. The main thing is to believe in something.

On HIV

The most important thing to remember is that the person beside you is worth the same as you, whatever their situation. Each of us has a little bit of God inside them

Anivaldo Padilha

Anivaldo works for our partner Koinonia, whose name means ‘fellowship’. He has twice visited UK area offices as a visiting speaker.

Why it is important for faith leaders to work on HIV

Brazilian culture is very religious, people turn to their faith a lot, and **religious institutions can either reinforce prejudice and discrimination, or they can fight against it.**

There are many places in Brazil where the state is not present but the churches are. We know how to deconstruct the myths around HIV using theological language.

What can Koinonia achieve, as an ecumenical organisation, that a secular organisation cannot?

The main difference is our capacity to mobilise religious institutions. Secular NGOs don't have that capacity. We come from a church background, so when we go into a church to speak people don't view us as aliens or strangers.

We know the language and the symbols that people use to build their lives. For example, the title of one of our publications was 'Churches as healing communities.' The state health services were worried at first as they thought we were suggesting healing in a medical sense but we explained that we meant it in a holistic sense.

You have to use the right language. Other NGOs often use political language. We use theological or religious language. Secular NGOs aren't able to do that and sometimes they alienate people instead of drawing them in.

WAD 09 theme is access to treatment and human rights. How does work on HIV fit with human rights?

Healthcare is a human right. That is in our constitution. If someone is sick they should have access to treatment and medicine, whatever their condition, and as Christians we should affirm and protect that right. Whatever their illness, people should have access to treatment.

What would you say to Christians who reject people living with HIV?

The Gospel calls on Christians to be in solidarity with anyone who is under stress of who is suffering from an illness. After all, that's what Jesus said when he began his ministry. He said, 'I have come to give sight to the blind, heal the sick, liberate the oppressed.'

Standing in solidarity with those who suffer is not an option for us, it is part of the essence of being Christian. So, as a Christian, you can't be a part of stigma against someone just because they are sick.

When Jesus cured people, he never asked how anyone got sick. He welcomed them with love and compassion and he didn't moralise with them, The churches should follow that example.

Some churches still have this moralistic approach, where they think it is relevant how the person got sick. That if it was through a blood transfusion that's ok but if it was through sex that's not ok. **Jesus never asked any questions. He just helped those who came to him.**

Part of our solidarity is to share what we have. We share our spiritual resources – prayers, our human resources – actions, and our financial resources, to help those who don't have enough.

What would you like CA supporters in the UK to pray for?

Oh we need so many prayers! One thing I'd always ask is for God to help us to never lose sight of our values and our commitment to always stand in solidarity with whoever is in need. Help us to never feel alone in our work, never let us feel powerless in the face of all the uphill battles, not just in terms of HIV but all the issues we work on – human rights in its broadest sense.