

“Daily Bread” and HIV & AIDS

Video reflection on the theme of the LWF Eleventh Assembly

20-27 July 2010 | Stuttgart, Germany

I am Pastor Cristobál. I come from Bolivia and am an indigenous person. You should be aware that 65% of the population of Bolivia are indigenous persons and in that context, the idea of “Give us this day our daily bread,” for me, has many implications.

It is not physical bread. When you relate it to HIV and AIDS, this bread, this sense of inclusiveness, means accepting another person although he or she has an illness.

They are even destined to die, they are discriminated against by society; how can I receive these people, how can I restore their dignity? That for me is daily bread. How can I sit down with these people, how can I support them, identify with their pain and share their hope? So, for me, daily bread has a very profound meaning because, at this moment when we are talking about HIV and AIDS, that is what is missing in our society. We have stigmatized these people; we have separated everyone into two groups: those who are bad and those who are good. But I believe when we say “give us our daily bread,” it means including these people, accompanying these people, putting yourself in their shoes, because sooner or later, we could also be in that situation. That is what is lacking in our society.

For me, daily bread does not only mean bringing love, bringing compassion to the people who are suffering, but also bringing—how shall I say—a fundamental aspect, namely, hope to the person who is suffering, an act of commitment here and now, if you would. It is a call which the God of life is addressing to me through that suffering brother or sister. God says “bread of life” to me. Jesus said it very clearly when he spoke about when I was ill, you did not visit me, I was thirsty and you did not give me a glass of water; I was sick—and I think we can relate to this somewhat—and I had AIDS. Each of us has the possibility to also respond to this, and that is the advantage I have by being part of the Lutheran community, which does not only involve gathering every Sunday, but also making a serious commitment to be empowered myself in order to be able as often as possible to overcome the prejudices we have, and begin to grasp that this brother living with HIV and AIDS is also the face of Jesus.

You see, in my context at present, the work is just getting started; it is not the same in other contexts where the work is more advanced. One can say that in my context this is something new, but, in the framework of the Millennium Development Goals, it invites us to reflect. In my context, stigmatization is still a reality; distinctions are made and a person who has this illness is not considered part of the community. But, look, that is a risk; it is a risk for me, but it is a risk that has to be accepted. If you do not take this risk

today as part of the Lutheran community, if today you say “Here I am Lord, here I am, Amen,” nothing will happen, my friend. The time has come to take the risk and be able to begin to act. The kingdom of God can be built not only by people who are healthy, but also by those who are calling upon us today and who need us. The commitment of the IELB—of the Bolivian Evangelical Lutheran Church—ever since 2007 has been to begin building a more inclusive church. In an inclusive church there are not only perfect people; there are persons living with this pandemic of HIV and AIDS or living with other incurable diseases. It means being by their side. When we include the most humble, then we will really sense that we are a church and that we are building the kingdom of God in our own context.

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