

Christian response to HIV pandemic expressed in art

HONG KONG – More than 20 entries depicting the Christian responsibility of taking a leading role in tackling concerns arising from the spread of HIV and AIDS in modern society were received from migrants in Hong Kong for a competition sponsored by St. John's Anglican Cathedral, a PWRDF partner. The art work was displayed in the Pedestrian Precinct of Chater Road at its annual HIV/AIDS Festival.

In a painting calling for all creation to be treasured and nurtured, called *The Prayer Warriors*, Filipino Barbara Xenia Cacho portrayed a baby within its mother's womb on its knees in deep prayer. The tube bringing the vital nutrition from the mother encircles the baby in the womb in a loving embrace, symbolizing the dependent relation between mother and child that is sustained by love.

Cacho is acknowledging the interdependence of all living things and the need to pray together in order to keep the fragile balance between health and sickness, life and death, joy and sorrow, intact.

The majority of the entries in the competition came from Indonesians, Sri Lankans and Thais, but others were also received from Nepali and Filipinos. The youngest entrant was five-year-old Indra Jayanthi Ranaweera from Sri Lanka who noted that "AIDS can ruin your life." Others called on society to take the challenge to stop the spread of AIDS seriously and also emphasized the importance of prayer in finding the strength and guidance for the task. The sacred nature of the family and the need for all relationships to be life giving was promoted in several of the entries.

In an afternoon hosted by Father Des Cox from the Anglican cathedral's HIV Education Centre, students from the Li Po Chun United World College dispelled a few myths about how the disease is transmitted. In an amusing skit, they pointed out the importance of understanding its nature and how people are ostracized from help and assistance through the sheer ignorance and prejudice of society.

Their to-the-point drama showed that HIV is not a monopoly of the same-sex-attracted and there are ways of contracting the disease other than sexual activity. It pointed to people's tendency to blame others for its spread and hit home on the fact that HIV is not transmitted through normal, everyday interaction between people or life in the home.

A series of colorful booths lining the street gave out information and conducted simple quizzes to ascertain the general level of public knowledge on the subject.

Problems concerning the overall health care of migrant workers in the territory were also addressed and the Filipino Midwives Association Hong Kong was on the spot carrying out simple health checks free of charge while students from the business studies department of the Chinese University of Hong Kong disseminated information on a variety of topics.

The afternoon featured some exciting folk dancing put on by groups from Thailand, Nepal, The Philippines and Sri Lanka, while Father Cox made presentations to the long list of individuals and groups that had given their time and talent freely to make the afternoon a success.

St. John's Cathedral offers counseling and support to victims of HIV as well as general advice on health care issues.

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