Participants should read through this handout, bearing in mind the following questions.

Focus questions:

- Some parts of the Catholic Church are opposed to education about, and promotion of, condoms for HIV prevention. How are the four main themes of a Christian approach to sexuality used to support this opposition?

- Some parts of the Catholic Church (and other churches) disagree with the teaching that condoms cannot be used for prevention of HIV. What rationales do they use?

- How do Christian churches that do not allow condom use for HIV prevention reconcile this with the associated risk of harm to church members?

- How do (or might) churches opposed to condom promotion explain their position to those who have become infected with HIV?

The texts

Catholic Church teaching on condoms and AIDS

Pope Benedict XVI, making his first papal visit to Africa, said that condoms are not the answer in the fight against HIV/AIDS. ‘A Christian can never remain silent,’ he said on arrival. HIV/AIDS was ‘a tragedy that cannot be overcome by money alone, that cannot be overcome through the distribution of condoms, which can even increase the problem.’ The solution lay in a ‘spiritual and human awakening’ and ‘friendship for those who suffer.’ In 2005 he told African bishops that abstinence and fidelity, not condoms, were the means to tackle the epidemic.

- Edited version of http://wwrn.org/articles/30519/?&place=western-africa

Accessed 28/02/2010

---

1 The Catholic Church features heavily in these texts reproduced on this handout because it has the highest profile amongst the churches opposed to condoms and HIV prevention. Also, its teachings are similar to those of many other churches. There is no intention to single out this particular church.
Priests resist condom use in HIV-hit Tanzania

A new school syllabus incorporating teaching about condoms has been described by Roman Catholic bishops in Tanzania as ‘unacceptable’, in spite of the spread of HIV/AIDS in the country. More than two million Tanzanians have been diagnosed HIV positive. ‘Introduction of the use of condoms in schools apart from being sinful, is indeed justification and opening the door for immoral lifestyles,’ said the Archbishop of Dar es Salaam. The bishop’s opposition did not imply the church was ‘blind to the magnitude of the loss of life and suffering to millions affected by the disease,’ he said. Rather, he said the church was obliged to defend human dignity.

- Edited version of
  http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/content/news_syndication/article_060123condom.shtml
  Accessed 28/02/2010

Cameroon Catholic cardinal backs condom use

The Cardinal of Cameroon has endorsed the use of condoms as a protective measure against HIV/AIDS—provided the couples using them are married. He said that if a partner in a marriage was infected with HIV, the use of condoms made sense. He also agreed with the overarching Vatican view that fidelity and abstinence remained the best protection against HIV. Around 11 per cent of Cameroon’s population are infected with HIV. Several church leaders have now broken ranks with the Vatican. Cardinal Georges Cottier, the theologian of the papal household, said that the biblical commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’ should be considered in cases where sexual activity involved a partner with HIV. Cardinal Javier Lozano Barragan, chair of the Pontifical Council on Health, has said he believed the use of condoms to be acceptable when abstinence is not an option.

- Edited version of
  http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/content/news_syndication/article_051128cathaid.shtml
  Accessed 28/02/2010
The Catholic Church and HIV prevention in Brazil

During the end of the 1980s, all AIDS prevention campaigns in Brazil mentioning condoms were automatically vetoed by the Catholic Church. The Church's influence upon the government, however, has decreased over the years such that government pamphlets now carry specific, graphic instructions on how to use condoms.

The Catholic Church must increasingly face reality even within its own ranks. Even though only one priest has thus far openly declared his HIV status, at least 25 of the 1410 priests in Sao Paolo are thought to have died of AIDS in the last five years, while a senior source in the Church believes that more than 40 priests out of a total 14,000 could be seriously ill; no one knows how many are asymptotically HIV-seropositive. It is clear that HIV cases identified and suspected thus far among the clergy were the result of sexual activity. In this context, the Church has become less verbally opposed to AIDS prevention campaigns, provides care for the sick without moral condemnation, and tends to support its HIV-seropositive priests.


Catholic and Protestant churches and AIDS prevention in Kenya

In Kenya … the Catholic Church condemned the use of condoms and any form of birth control; Protestant churches have been less harsh, but also condemn premarital sex, birth control, and condoms. In spite of this, most schools and local clinics, including those run by various churches, are conducting HIV prevention education and condom distribution programs. In some youth groups, HIV prevention methods are being discussed with the full knowledge of the church hierarchy. Government nurses and health educators have been allowed to conduct classes on family planning, premarital sex, and birth control in Catholic schools. Condoms are distributed within this framework for the prevention of HIV. Although not publicly approved, Kenyan churches, Catholic and Protestant, are permitting HIV prevention programs to enter through their back doors.

Faith-based HIV work ‘doing more harm than good’

According to church leaders at the 2006 International HIV Conference, faith-based HIV work can do more harm than good. The Rev J.P. Heath of the African Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Affected by HIV spoke on the need for the churches to engage far more honestly with the realities of HIV/AIDS. ‘As faith-based organisations we have been involved in HIV prevention, but we have been doing more harm than good. We have offered care—made promises to look after orphans and help with funeral fees. We must stop helping people to die and start helping them to live.’

The head of the Lutheran World Federation said the church had to understand that the prohibition on the use of condoms was exacerbating the disease rather than preventing it. Abstinence as the only form of prevention was not viable when discussing HIV prevention. ‘Churches must realise that the use of condoms in fighting HIV is not contrary to our moral teaching.’ The Rev J.P. Heath said that donor agencies, and especially faith-based ones, must listen to those on the ground who understand what is needed in their communities.

Christians have much to learn from other faiths about overcoming stigmatisation of people living with HIV, the faith leaders meeting was also told. ‘Buddhists are amazing because they are so humble. They are an example of a non-judgmental religion,’ said Dr Manoj Kurian, who coordinates work on HIV and AIDS for the Geneva-based World Council of Churches. ‘They accept people as they are.’

• Edited version of

http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/content/news_syndication/article_060816hiv.shtml

Accessed 28/02/2010

U.S. Church leaders on youth sexuality education

Religious traditions affirm that sexuality is a divinely bestowed blessing for expressing love and generating life, for mutual companionship and pleasure… Religions have a venerable tradition supporting healing, health care, disease prevention, and health promotion. They also express commitment to the most marginalised, the most vulnerable, those most likely to be excluded. Sexuality education programs must benefit all young people regardless of income, class, ethnicity, and gender… be inclusive of those who are heterosexual and those who are
sexual minorities, those who are abstinent and those who have had sexual relationships, and those who have experienced brokenness and oppression about their sexuality…

Education that respects and empowers young people has more integrity than education based on incomplete information, fear, and shame. Programs that teach abstinence exclusively and withhold information about pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease prevention fail our young people. Scriptural and theological commitment to telling the truth calls for full and honest education about sexual and reproductive health …


Accessed 28/02/2010