

Diocese of Atlanta Commission on AIDS - 2016

The work of the Diocesan Commission on AIDS continues its work, however unchanging it may seem to be. The characterization of monotony might seem reasonably accurate except for the ministry that has, over the last 25 years, been the primary focus of the Commission on AIDS: The Province IV Network of AIDS Ministries annual Kanuga Retreat. It is at that retreat each June that those of us who sponsor and facilitate the retreat see the reality of life for those for whom HIV/AIDS is NOT a chronic condition, but still a cause for anxiety and worry about the future.

HIV/AIDS is manageable with some very clear qualifications: adequate resources to obtain the treatment and medications necessary to keep the virus at bay, whether large amounts of money or good health insurance; otherwise the remaining resource becomes the public health care system. HIV/AIDS being a manageable condition also requires one to be literate enough and have a comprehension level adequate enough to understand the words on medication bottles and follow the strict regimen required for successful management of HIV/AIDS. For an extraordinarily large percentage of those who now live with HIV/AIDS and who come to the retreat each year, the above qualifiers are daily challenges...challenges often beyond their capabilities. Province IV continues to be the “home” of increasing infection rates. New medications aimed at preventing infection have become available but at a high price and still require the use of condoms to be as effective as possible. Even so, the barriers of illiteracy, accessibility, cost and usage work against the fight against infection with HIV.

The 25th annual retreat held last June brought some peace and time of respite to those who attended. They were loved and cared for by a peculiar group of folks known as Episcopalians. And for a precious few days of their lives, their world was a very different and a better place.

Sadly, however, the 25th retreat was the last that will be facilitated by the group that began it 25 years ago. Many on that committee were exhausted and burned out by the valuable but very draining work that goes into planning such a retreat. There are hopes that another group in Province IV might undertake a similar retreat, but that has not materialized to date.

Harsh realities still face us: Six of the ten cities with the highest HIV prevalence rate are still in Province IV. Atlanta is one of those, occupying our seemingly perpetual spot of number eight. HIV hasn't gone away. It just affects very few of those who sit in our pews each Sunday.

The Commission on AIDS is grateful beyond expression for the financial support provided by the Diocese of Atlanta that allowed us to provide scholarship assistance to those who wanted to attend the annual retreat. That generosity touched countless lives in ways we may never even know.

Questions may be directed to Bruce Garner at bruce.garner@att.net .

Bruce Garner, Chair (All Saints' Atlanta) Lola Thomas, Retreat Chair (Church of the Ascension, Cartersville)