

Cardinal confirms stance on AIDS debate

IN THE wake of the debate over the issue of condoms and the spread of HIV/AIDS which intensified last week as World AIDS Day was marked, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor has moved to reiterate the Church's position on the issue.

In a letter sent to a US publication by Mgr Andrew Summersgill, general secretary of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, on the cardinal's behalf, he refers to the recent document 'Cherishing Life', which concludes that "the only assured way to prevent passing on [sexually-transmitted diseases] is to express love in ways other than through sexual intercourse."

The cardinal stresses that the Bishops' Conference is fully in line with Magisterium teaching on this question and he summarised that position as follows:

"The bishops oppose artificial contraception and do not advocate the promotion of condoms as a means of combating AIDS. The way to combat AIDS is through the Catholic sexual ethic of monogamy, fidelity and abstinence.

"The Magisterium of the Church always maintains the objectivity of the moral law, whilst also recognising the particular circumstances in which individuals endeavour to live her teaching."

A row blew up some weeks ago over the position of CAFOD on the issue after sections of an article by an official of the Church aid agency were taken in some quarters as indicating the organisation was at odds with Church teaching on the prevention of the spread of HIV/AIDS.

But a CAFOD spokesman dismissed this view and restated the agency's position.

"CAFOD's experience has taught us that there is no simplistic answer to the complex HIV pandemic so our approach is holistic taking in all factors that contribute to the spread of the environment," said a spokesperson.

"Drawing on 20 years of HIV work as a Catholic aid agency, CAFOD believes that effective HIV prevention work should be viewed not as a one-off message but as a process in which we help people assess their current risks and take steps to reduce those risks, working towards clearly identified ideals of abstinence or marital monogamy.

"As the official agency of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales and respectful of Catholic teaching and beliefs, CAFOD does not fund the supply, distribution or promotion of condoms. Our Catholic faith is the foundation of our work, informing and guiding everything we do."

United for Life

Raising greater awareness of human life issues

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The Editor
The Universe

Dear Sir

As the Cardinal attempts to 'confirm his stance on condoms', *The Universe*, December 12, 2004, the fact is that the Cardinal was recently awarded by an international organisation, Catholics for a Free Choice, CFFC, for his condom promotion stance. The Cardinal stated in *The Independent*, in July, "that there are places where it [condoms] might be licit, or allowable, as when there's a danger of intercourse leading to death". The Cardinal's condom award should be taken as a call for the Cardinal, and others, to rescind their support for condom use and as an opportunity for them to condemn CFFC and the like as the American bishops have done.

CAFOD's HIV policy document presented at the International AIDS Conference in Bangkok, July 2004, calls for an ABC, abstain, be faithful, use a condom, approach to HIV prevention. It is therefore disingenuous of Fr. Andrew Summersgill, general secretary to the bishops conference, to try to suggest that the bishops are in keeping with church teaching. If anyone is misleading others, as Fr Summersgill has claimed, it is CFFC, CAFOD and the bishops.

It is the duty of the bishops and all the faithful to defend the deposit of faith. Canon Law protects the Catholic laity from abuse by the bishops, and by others, and gives the laity the right to receive from the bishops doctrinally correct and authentic teaching and preaching whether it is the spoken or written word. We must call our bishops to account as constituted by Canon Law because the Church has given us this law for our own protection. More information on defending the canonical rights of lay Catholics can be found on www.st.joseph.foundation.org

Yours faithfully

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