General Conclusion

Our exploration concerning the origin, causes, diffusions and the ravaging effects of HIV/AIDS has given us some picture of the virulence of this new pandemic and the way it is destroying individuals, families and even societies itself. The specter it raises before our eyes is ghastly; and the statistics of those who have been succumbing to it is terrifying. The most vulnerable are the youth and in some parts of the world, notably Sub-Saharan Africa, the disease is spreading at an alarming rate and orphaning thousands and even millions of children.

All the resources of human intelligence, creativity and inventive skills, especially in the medical and allied fields have not yet succeeded in finding a remedy for the malaise. As a consequence the victims of AIDS who are also victims of pain, shame, stigmatization by society, suspicion, aversion and isolation are driven to despondency, rejection and despair. Not only has their life being broken and their character destroyed but they are also in danger from the view point of Christian faith of losing faith not only in other people and in themselves, but also faith in God.
Such a state of affairs is likely to be the cause of manifold ruptures in family and social relationships as well as relationships with Church and religious congregations. It is this last mentioned aspect of the problem that this research wishes first and foremost to address. Because, although from merely human point of view everything seems lost, Christians believe that Jesus is still able to rescue and to save. Let us remember the thief who was crucified along with Jesus. Though everything seemed lost, at the eleventh hour the man was saved.

This whole research is geared towards an effective pastoral ministry that aims precisely at achieving the salvation of HIV/AIDS victims even when humanly speaking everything seems lost.

The pastors/health care workers must acquire sufficient general information regarding the history of HIV/AIDS in general and the causes of incidence and transmission. In this thesis the first and the second chapters, dealing respectively on the nature of HIV/AIDS and Transmission of HIV/AIDS give a scientific knowledge about the disease. Awareness is the watchword for everybody. It has been said that one good thing about AIDS is that HIV can be completely prevented by changing a few specific behaviors.

In the third chapter, AIDS: Ethical and Social Repercussions, a study has been made of the impact of
HIV/AIDS on the ethical and social dimensions of man. Of course this research has not been in exhaustive there are many more areas, which are not explored. This thesis highlights the important areas where humanity should rethink about its behavior to be in conformity with the laws of God and morals.

Pastors must have an awareness of the magnitude of the problem and also create and promote that awareness especially in sectors of the populations where there is greater vulnerability. The pastors and healthcare workers as agents of a spiritual ministry must emphasize the importance of correct ethical principles and standards to be followed and instill into the youth the truth of the saying, 'that prevention is better than cure.' The permissiveness of government organization as well as of those who persist in violating moral laws while taking means to avoid contracting the virus are to be resisted.

With the advance of materialism particularly in the West traditional faith has been on the decline. This has resulted in the erosion of right thinking and right living particularly among the youth. Governments and legislatures have been promulgating laws directly against the commands of God. Thus providing the youth with ample facilities and even incentives to all sorts of amoral and immoral conduct. Now it is up to the pastors and ministers of the Churches to reinstate God’s laws in order to rehabilitate Christian society. Though pastors and ministers are earnestly counseled not to be judgmental in their approach to
patients, it seems indisputable that in a general way AIDS is really a punishment inflicted by nature on a humanity that has gone astray. A shortcut to the rehabilitation of humanity as far as AIDS is concerned is, ‘no pre-marital and extra-marital’ relations (Chapter 4).

It is now the responsibility of the Church as the one that gives importance to the ‘Healing Ministry’ to serve the people who are under the yoke of HIV/AIDS. We have seen how, right from the Pope, the Universal Head of the Church, the various Christian denominations, various dioceses and local Churches have been now fully geared to combat the disease. With this background the CBCI has called upon all Catholics to recognize the great values enshrined in the Bible and the teachings of the Church. We have to perceive rightly the male-female relationship, God’s plan for procreation and for the realization of one’s unconditional sharing of one’s self with the life partner. It goes without saying that the Church’s pastoral role should be in conformity with the mind of its Divine Master (Chapter 5).

It is this Christian courage that includes the eagerness and readiness to take the next bold step of completely involving oneself in the ministry to people with HIV/AIDS. In the Johnnine narrative of the Last Supper, Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. What is the message for us? It is very explicit.
You are to do for others as I have done to you.\textsuperscript{252} There is an interesting Talmud story that imparts a similar message. Rabbi Joshua was concerned that he might not recognize the messiah, and asked Elijah to instruct him.

‘Where’, asked R. Joshua, ‘shall I find the messiah?’
‘At the gate of the city’, Elijah replied.
‘How shall I recognize him?’
‘He sits among the lepers?’
‘Among the lepers!’, exclaimed R. Joshua,
‘and What is he doing there?’
‘He changes their bandages’, Elijah answered,
‘He changes them one by one’.\textsuperscript{253}

This Talmudic writer or commentator seems to have understood messianic text in the Old Testament more profoundly than some of Jesus’ contemporaries.

Thus the HIV/AIDS epidemic has become a challenge to the Church to be in the forefront and serving Jesus’ ‘little ones’. The Church has to provide adequate resources to people whose lives are blighted by HIV/AIDS. It is here that the Interfaith Pastoral Ministry can be strong support to the ongoing struggle of the HIV/AIDS people. The nature and range of the epidemic has turned HIV/AIDS into a national and international pre-

\textsuperscript{252} Holy Bible, Jn : 13:15, Theological Publications in India, Bangalore, 1999
\textsuperscript{253} Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98a; quoted in AIDS and the Church, by Earl E Shelp and Ronald H. Sunderland, p. 198
occupation. No country, institution, society, organization can grapple single-handed with this endemic problem.

Urgency, challenge, opportunity and task must characterize our response to this calamity. There is urgency that we engage in the struggle wholeheartedly and without delay. HIV/AIDS has created an unprecedented situation, which demands an intense pastoral response from the religious communities. This urgency is more experienced by and manifested in the actual life situations of HIV/AIDS people. It is estimated by the WHO, that by the year 2025 the world will have more than 60 million people infected with HIV/AIDS.

AIDS is not only a Challenge to the Medical Community, but it is also as we have seen already but also to people in all walks of life and particularly to the pastors of the Churches. There is stigma that potentially destroys lives and communities. It is to be noted that the situation of many people with HIV/AIDS is one of unprecedented and chronic grief that demands an intense pastoral response from the Church. It is a situation that cries out for redemptive response. There is a third epithet, that calls for our attention and action is 'opportunity'. The epidemic of HIV/AIDS is an opportunity before the Church to reflect on its identity and mission. It is of basic importance for the Church to meet the opportunities for ministries created by the HIV/AIDS epidemic.
There are also ministries of hope, comfort and companionship in the face of despair, grief, helplessness and isolation. The fourth feature that should characterize our appreciation is *task*. The task at hand now is to constitute an accepting community concerned for the need of HIV positive people. It is now more than ever that Church is confronted with the opportunity to make credible the New Testament image of God's people as a reconciling and redeeming community. If we fail, it will be a failure of not only of nerve, but also of love.

Let me conclude with the words of Herbert Daniel (1946 – 1992), Brazilian poet, AIDS activist and member of the Global AIDS Policy Coalition. These words have made an impression on me in the context of my research.

```
' I hope that one day
When death finally comes, by
Chance or by any infection
Caused by the Virus
Nobody says that I was defeated
By AIDS. I have succeeded
In living with AIDS.
AIDS has not defeated me...'^254
```

254 HERBERT DANIEL, 'The Soul of a Citizen'.