

Roscommon Sister raises money for HIV patients in Brazil with Christmas appeal

Renata Steffens

Halfway through Advent, when Christians are invited to look for hope in darkness, *The Irish Catholic* spoke to Roscommon native Sr Margaret Hosty, who's been living in Brazil for 40 years and founded an organisation to support people living with HIV/AIDS.

Speaking about Christmas celebrations, Sr Hosty recalls her first December 25 in the south of the Equator, forty years ago. "I was up in the State of Tocantins," she said, "Christmas was very simple... Christmas nowadays is just so commercialised."

Focusing on the real meaning of Christmas, away from decorations and present exchanges, she spoke about the work done in Grupo AAVE, the charity she co-founded in 1995 to support those living with HIV.

Compassion

"In the last couple of years" Grupo AAVE has been doing Christmas appeals. "We've been asking for R\$2, which would be maybe 25 cents. There's nobody who doesn't have it." One would assume that, asking for so little, the organisation would raise a lot of money in the 'time of giving', but that is not necessarily the case.

She explained that this is "because

we work with people who have HIV, we work with people who are trans, homosexuals, prostitutes, you name it. There's just an awful lot of discrimination. And people will donate to the flora and the fauna and take care of the animals, which is important, but if they were to choose one or the other, depending on their prejudice or their perception," they wouldn't donate to those living with HIV. "It's really hard to get funding because of who we work with... that's the disappointing part."

"I would do anything to find money to pay for medication, because people don't choose to be sick"

Sr Hosty founded Grupo AAVE thirty years ago, and over the last three decades, the way people see those living with HIV has changed, but "stigma and discrimination are very, very prevalent still."

"The government gives the medication for free for the cocktail for the virus." However, the medication for opportunistic infections "has to be



Milk donated to service users for Christmas. Photo: courtesy of Sr Margaret Hosty.

bought for the most part. Very little of it is available from the state.

"And that's what we look for money for, because when a person needs an antibiotic or whatever other medication, it's often hard [for them] to get it, they can't afford to buy it because we work with people who are poor... I would do anything to find money to pay for medication, because people don't choose to be sick."

Stigma

The stigma is such a problem; people don't want others to know they live with the virus. During celebrations

at AAVE they could call the press, she explains, "that would bring a lot of publicity." But if the press comes with cameras, "our service users would hide because they're afraid, and with reason too. Because someone is going to look at this on television and they're going to see 'Dona Maria', who is renting from them, so they would find an excuse to terminate the rent contract with her."

But not everything is bad news. Even though discrimination is still a major problem for those living with the virus, Sr Hosty said last Christmas they raised R\$5,000, which would

be around €900.

"So far this year, we have raised R\$2,400," she said. The donations are usually way above the requested R\$2, the Sister explained. "Some people have given four... Some people give 10, 20, 50, 100. The highest we've gotten from a person was from a doctor of infectious diseases, who really admires our work, and gave us R\$500 this year. It's a really good fundraiser."

Sr Hosty explained they don't advertise their Christmas appeal abroad. "Misean Cara is always encouraging us to try and get local funding."

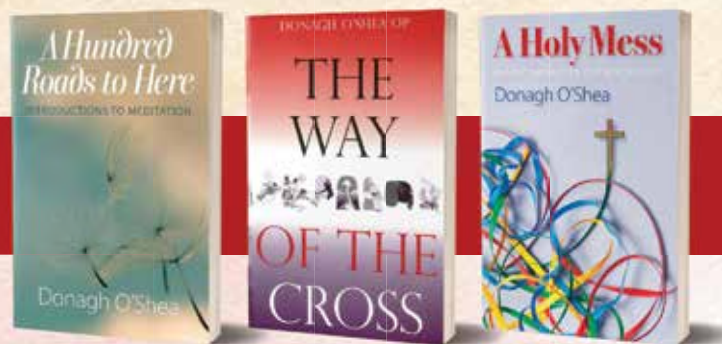
Their Christmas campaign is not only for money. "Another thing we do is we ask for, and we get an awful lot of food for our service users. We would always put on a celebration, which includes a religious moment at the beginning, a sharing of how the year has been, maybe a bit of evaluations, that kind of thing."

"And then a nice snack of *pão de queijo* and other delicious things and juices. We would give them a food basket. And this year, we'll be able to give them a little hygiene kit, with shampoo and conditioner, deodorant, toothpaste and soap. Those kinds of things."

"We always celebrate Christmas at AAVE. Some of the staff and some of the service users put up their decorations. AAVE is all decorated!"

Get 3 of Donagh O'Shea's books for just €30!

Special Offer



PLUS!

If you're in Ireland, enjoy FREE shipping by using the code **FREESHIP** at checkout. Offer ends 31st January 2026.

Order online, by phone, or by post – UK/NI Shipping €8.50 P&P

CONTACT

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

CARD DETAILS

Card Number _____

Expiry ____/____ CVC _____

DOMINICAN PUBLICATIONS
42 Parnell Square West, Dublin 1, D01 P5R7
01 8721611 (Intl. 00353 1 8721611)
info@dominicanpublications.com
www.dominicanpublications.com



Dominican Publications, Inspiring Christian faith and spirituality since 1897
through books and journals – shipped worldwide

Experience the Spirit of Christmas at St Martin Apostolate

Religious Goods Shop

Beautiful Christmas gifts, cribs, decorations & devotional items plus much more in-store & online!

Oratory

A peaceful haven in the heart of the city.

Home to Dublin's Best FREE Event, The Moving Crib

A Christmas tradition for all ages. Open daily - 11am - 5.30pm*

Shop Open 7 Days until 4th Jan*

Mon-Fri: 9.30am-5.30pm | Sat & Sun: 11am-5.30pm

*Closed: 25th, 26th Dec & 1st Jan | Early 3pm closing 24th & 31st Dec |
11am Opening 29th & 30th Dec

WWW.STMARTIN.IE | 01 874 5465

42 PARNELL SQUARE WEST, DUBLIN 1, D01 P5R7