Moral Minority

A positive chaplain’s crusade for needle exchange.

June 1, 2008 By Nicole Joseph

In January, San Antonio lay chaplain Bill Day, 73, and two other members of his Bexar Area Harm Reduction Coalition were arrested for giving clean needles to drug users, which is illegal in Texas. The misdemeanor charges were quickly dropped—after Day started a public outcry. He chatted with *POZ*’s Nicole Joseph:

***POZ*: Why did you start the coalition?**
Day: When I found out I was positive, in 1999, my viral count was 2.2 million and my CD4 count was 24. They told my family I had two weeks to live. I didn’t want anybody to go through that.

But needle exchange is illegal in Texas.
Yes, but we had tremendous support—from AIDS agencies, the health department, my church.... Some people wanted to sit around [until] the day when Texas legalized it; others of us didn’t [want to wait].

You’ve called your work a “moral imperative.” Why?
Talking in biblical terms, it’s a [moral imperative] to help the “least among us.” We’re going back out as soon as our legal problems are over.

Won’t you just be arrested again?
If the district attorney does arrest me again, I’m going in through the front door, surrounded by Episcopalian priests, about 15 or 20 members of our church and people from all over the town. It’s going to be a spectacle if that’s what she does, and she knows it.

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