Take the lead

Vat Voor

Hola phambili.
Tsaya Ketapele.
Khokela

Stop Aids. Keep the promise

Guidelines for World Aids Day 2007
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PLEASE NOTE: This information does not contain a fully detailed liturgy, but merely guidelines for the planning of a liturgy according to local needs and customs.
Dear Sister/Brother in the service of our Lord

“World Aids Day 1 December 2007”

We greet you in the Name of Jesus Christ and trust that you are well.

“World Aids Day” is just around the corner!

People living with HIV – members of our congregations – are anxious to hear and to know, “We care for you; We pray for you; You are part of our congregation; We are here for you.”

Therefore every leader of a congregation and every preacher needs to consider the following: What is the message that I am conveying with my words – or by my silence? Do my neighbours and the congregants living with HIV find understanding or condemnation from me?

The Aids Task Team of the DRC (Western and Southern Cape) and the UCRSA (Cape) compiled guidelines for “World Aids Day 2007” in collaboration with CABSA. These guidelines are being distributed in co-operation with the United Ministry for Service and Witness of the DRC family.

“World Aids Day” is an opportunity to communicate the love of Christ. Therefore, let us prepare ourselves on time to visibly and tangibly demonstrate Christ’s love for all people living with HIV on Sunday, 25 November and/or Sunday, 2 December. This is also an opportunity to call people to greater account.

We pray that these guidelines will assist you to spread a message of hope, love, reconciliation and responsibility during the week of “World Aids Day” and also during 2008.

Prof P Meiring (chairperson), DRC,
Rev Jimmy de Wet (vice chairperson), UCRSA,
Elder Kovilan Moodley, RCA,
Dr Andries Hoffman, DRCA

2. Concept declaration for church leadership on World Aids Day 2007

We thank the Lord for the worldwide growth in the awareness about the devastating effects of HIV and Aids on humankind.

Faith communities have a key responsibility in the fight against the pandemic. As the moderators / church council we would like to acknowledge all spiritual leaders and members who actively support people living with HIV and aids as well as those involved in enhancing Christian values among young and old.

We underline the key role that spiritual leaders have to equip Christians in the fight against the catastrophic impact of HIV and aids on individuals and communities. We encourage leaders to guide the faith community with empathy and compassion in their efforts.
We are convinced that the following are important weapons in the war against HIV and aids:

- Responsible and trustworthy information for all concerned.
- The development of Biblical values as the foundation for healthy moral and ethical values.
- Compassionate care for people living with HIV and aids.
- We need Biblical grounds to speak out against gender discrimination.
- We demand that the responsible governmental institutions fulfil their promises with regard to the Aids pandemic.

Unfortunately there are still those who, due to their insensitivity, silence and lack of knowledge, stigmatize and marginalise people living with aids. Irresponsible and risky behaviour as well as stigmatization is sin and encourages the spread and life threatening effect of HIV and aids.

Our ideal is that churches and faith communities at local level should become more involved with people living with HIV and aids and should whole heartedly support responsible programmes and projects aimed at curbing the pandemic.

We encourage congregations to make use of the guidelines and literature provided by the Aids Forum and to arrange a worship service on the Sunday before or after World Aids Day, 1 December, and to focus on the pandemic and its effects and on our responsibilities in this regard.

3. Background: World Aids Day and Aids Memorial Day

“World Aids Day” originated in 1988. In 1997 UNAIDS recognised the need for global action with one message. “World Aids Day” was already held regularly on the 1st of December and had gained acceptance, therefore it was decided to join the movement. Later it became an independent campaign driven by the World Aids Campaign. During the past few years, churches also made use of the Sunday before or after 1 December as an opportunity to focus on HIV and Aids.

From 1996 to 2004 a specific theme was developed annually for “World Aids Day.” From 2005 the focus is on “Stop Aids. Keep the Promise.” The reasoning behind this theme is that so many promises have been made (from top government level to individual level), but that so few of these promises have been fulfilled. This year, within this theme, the focus is on the role that leaders ought to play.

“Aids Memorial Day” (or AMD – also called “International Aids Candlelight Memorial”) is probably lesser known than “World Aids Day.” “Aids Memorial Day” originated earlier. The first opportunity was in 1983. The fact that it was linked to a specific Sunday from the start, gave it an ecclesiastical character. “Aids Memorial Day” takes place worldwide on the 3rd Sunday in May.
4. **Tips for preparing and presenting the liturgical programme**

- Arrange with members of the congregation or services to make posters (A3 or larger) in advance, bearing the following messages (one message per placard, but there may be more than one of the same placard):

  - THE WORLD HAS AIDS! / AFRICA HAS AIDS! / SOUTH AFRICA HAS AIDS!
  - DOES THE CHURCH HAVE AIDS? / DOES OUR CONGREGATION HAVE AIDS?
  - THE CHURCH HAS AIDS! / OUR CONGREGATION HAS AIDS!
  - “HELP TO CARRY ONE ANOTHER’S BURDENS” (Galatians 6:2a)
  - “IF ONE PART OF THE BODY SUFFERS, ALL THE OTHER PARTS SUFFER WITH IT” (1 Corinthians 12:26a)
  - “WHENEVER YOU DID THIS FOR ONE OF THE LEAST IMPORTANT OF THESE BROTHERS OF MINE, YOU DID IT FOR ME” (Matthew 25:40)
  - “WHEN, LORD, DID WE EVER SEE YOU HUNGRY AND FEED YOU, OR THIRSTY AND GIVE YOU A DRINK?” (Matthew 25:37).

- Arrange that the posters are placed in the church building before the church service on the Sunday closest to the 1st of December. People could also stand around with posters in front of the church doors before the service as if participating in a type of peaceful “protest.” The information on the posters should address the congregation in advance and make them reflect: Can we distance ourselves from the pandemic?

- Ensure that the message’s theme is prominently visible in the church: “THE LEADERSHIP ROLE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HIV AND AIDS.”

5. **Candle ceremony**

Place one large candle decorated with an Aids ribbon in a prominent spot in the front of the church for all to see. Then place enough candles around it to represent the different ministries/services/leadership in the congregation, e.g. the church council, ministers, women’s ministry, catechism/Sunday School, charity service, etc.

Light the large candle before the service and let it burn during the run of the service.

At the end of the message, all leaders of the services, the church council, ministers, etc. will be asked to come forward and to light a candle from the large candle as symbol of the Church extending her hand to touch those living with HIV and Aids with God’s love.

Let one of these leaders do a prayer to dedicate those living with HIV and Aids, and their families, to the Lord.
6. Prayer

To You o God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, comes all the praise!

You are the Father showing us compassion and the God that gives us courage in each situation.

We thank You that You comfort us in every difficult situation.

Thank You for encouraging us so that we can also comfort others who are experiencing various hardships, with the same encouragement that You comfort us with (See 2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Today we pray for ourselves and for so many others amongst us who desire Your encouragement.

We pray for everyone living with HIV;

- Everyone who hides this knowledge like a great secret;
- Everyone who is ostracised by friends and family because it was made known;
- Everyone who is struggling with countless illnesses as a result of HIV;
- Everyone who is mourning because a loved one passed away;
- Everyone who is struggling to lead a normal life as a result of HIV and Aids.

Lord Jesus, You set us an example when You showed the lepers compassion against the customs of the time.

You specifically showed the leaders this by sending the healed leper to the priests.

Therefore we pray that Your church leaders will set the right example by showing compassion towards people who are stigmatised.

Today we pray for our leaders

We pray for ourselves – because You call Your children to lead in the community –

Grant us the grace to be Your loyal disciples

- That we will boldly take the side of those touched by HIV and Aids
- That we will overcome condemnation, discrimination and stigmatisation with Your love
- That we will become involved with the relief of need
- Help us to set examples of compassion, responsibility and self-control with our lives.

Let Your Kingdom come

Let Your will be done

Let Your Name be exalted and glorified

Let it happen in this time of HIV and Aids!

Amen
7. **Hymns**

A selection from the following hymns can be sung during the service:

Nuwe Sionsgesange (URCSA): 154, 141 and 139
DRC Hymnbook: 308, 486 and 526

8. **Discussing the “reality of HIV and Aids”**

It is important that the reality of HIV and Aids is addressed during the service. How much emphasis is placed on this, will depend on the congregation’s experience and perception of the Aids pandemic. There will be less focus necessary on this aspect within the service where the impact of the pandemic is experienced by the congregation (via funerals, illnesses, families where parents have passed away, etc). However, where congregations experience little impact, this moment will be very important within the service to stress the reality of HIV and Aids.

The congregation can be reminded of the reality of HIV and Aids by either a testimony, or a suitable reading from the Bible, or by incorporating statistics. A few comments are made about each option.

**EITHER: Testimony: “This is how HIV and Aids affects me.”**

The testimony of someone living with HIV (or someone directly affected by it) can convey a powerful message. It is however very important to handle the occasion with great sensitivity.

Please keep the following in mind:

- Arrange with the person long in advance. Ensure that there are no misunderstandings regarding an honorarium.
- Ensure that the person is emotionally ready to speak before the service.
- Introduce the person as someone who will relate how his/her life is affected by HIV. Do not introduce the person as being “HIV+” or something similar.
- Do not give various people too short an opportunity to speak. Rather give one person sufficient time.
- Arrange in advance who will thank the person briefly. It is important that the person is assured of everyone present’s sympathy and that something of this will be made visible. Remember: it is asking a lot to share a personal story with a group of people.

**OR: Use of a pericope from Scripture**

Pericopes illustrating believers’ struggles in difficult times can also be suitable.

The pericopes can be introduced by pointing out that although HIV and Aids were unknown in Biblical times (it has only been known for the past 26 years), honest and sincere descriptions of the struggles of believers with the sorrow and suffering of life, are found in the Bible. The passages that we read, can help us to understand how someone living with HIV might feel when things take a turn for the worst, when God’s grace is experienced and when new meaning in life is rediscovered.

Psalms 31:9-16 (in some translations verses 10-17) or Isaiah 38:9-20

And Psalms 16:1-11
OR: **Incorporate statistics**

Information on statistics is available on the webpage [www.cabsa.co.za](http://www.cabsa.co.za) or can be requested from management@cabsa.co.za.

It is recommended that local statistics be added to these general statistics. The local clinics or hospital might be helpful in giving an indication of the incidence of HIV in the local community. However, please be mindful of the fact that statistics can easily be confusing if it is not communicated directly and plainly. It is important that the person communicating the statistics has good insight and that he/she won’t confuse various statistical criteria, for instance “HIV” and “Aids”.

### 9. Outlines for a sermon

**Pericope:** Mark 1:40-45

**Text:** Mark 1:41 – *Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man. Then He said: “I am willing. Be healed!”*

**Theme:** **The Leadership role in the fight against HIV and Aids**

The theme of this year’s “World Aids Day” is leadership in the fight against HIV and Aids. Someone once said that leadership refers to a person’s capabilities and competence in order to make a difference. It is someone who reacts to a community’s needs, who supports others with planning and campaigns and who empowers people by word and deed.

When it comes to “World Aids Day”, spiritual and community leaders should share and be helpful expressing a vision, establishing relationships, and taking concrete action in solidarity with all campaigning for HIV and Aids prevention, treatment and care.

In Mark 1 (the healing of a leper), Jesus shows clearly how a true leader should act in order to reach out to an outcast in the community. What Jesus did, was totally wrong, shocking and irreligious according to Jewish laws and customs. In those days every skin disorder was referred to as leprosy. One of the biggest disasters you could experience was to develop a skin disorder or leprosy. It meant that you weren’t allowed to fill your place in society any longer. Such a person then lives a life of hell until he/she is one day “mercifully” set free by death.

A leper was usually banned from his home and community. He wasn’t allowed to touch a healthy person. If he or she encountered someone along the way, they had to warn them from afar, “Impure! Impure!” Although leprosy isn’t contagious, but because the illness makes you impure according to the law, it immediately made anyone touching you impure too. Even entering a house resulted in that the house and everything inside it is declared impure. It can only be purified by way of certain ceremonies.

For the rest of his/her life, the leper was an outcast and he/she carried a stigma. A stigma of someone punished by God. In Biblical times leprosy was often seen as punishment for one or other sin, like pride or blasphemy, or perhaps some or other moral sin. Not only was the person ostracised by the community, but it was believed that he/she was actually rejected by God because of the judgement of impurity.

We must understand Jesus’ conduct in Mark 1 against this background. The first thing that happened is that Jesus felt compassion for the man. In those times lepers hardly, if ever, experienced compassion because they were outcasts. They believed that there was no mercy for them – only rejection by their own people. That is why they also experienced it as rejection by
God. On the contrary, Jesus' heart went out to the outcast. He was filled with compassion and empathy.

But it didn't just stay with compassion. Jesus went further. He not only allowed the man to come forward to Him and kneel before Him. He furthermore does the unheard-of by touching the ostracised, impure leper. We must not overlook the impact of the words in verse 41: Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man. According to law, this of course made Jesus impure. Here we see how Jesus identifies with the destitute in a special way.

We see Jesus as a leader filled with true sympathy, true compassion, empathy, and identification with, an attempt to really care versus the strict legalistic and often merciless manner in which society handle lepers. His sympathy and caring forces him into action. Not the laws, customs or traditions of the time can prevent Him from getting involved. I am certain that the news of the healing of the leper led to great uproar and heated criticism from the Jewish spiritual leaders. In Jesus we see our God's mercy – it is how God is. He can't be different. In Jesus the love of God is shown that identifies Him with the pain, suffering and struggle of a broken world. The "condemned", ostracised, stigmatised leper is healed – his life is restored to him.

In many instances there are similarities between leprosy and HIV and Aids. Of course there are enormous differences too, but it is important that we first spot the similarities. Just as in the case when a person discovers that he has leprosy, a person who tests positive for HIV experiences a whirlpool of emotions like shock, denial, anger, aggression, depression and ultimately acceptance. As with the lepers in Biblical times, people of today living with HIV and Aids are also sometimes still subjected to condemnation, discrimination and stigmatisation. There are people who regard HIV and Aids as a punishment from God because of infected people's supposed "moral sins." On "World Aids Day" each leader is challenged to also fearlessly come forward following Jesus' example towards the leper - in the interest of the great number of people living with HIV and Aids.

What are we as body of church leaders to do?

- The first and most important thing we must realise, is: if we want to stay true to our calling as disciples of Christ, we must be prepared to identify ourselves with the sufferers of this world. Like the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-7; 50:4-11), we are also called to share in the pain and suffering of all living with HIV and Aids. The need of the suffering should also fill us with sympathy, compassion and empathy like it did Jesus. Following Jesus' example, we should also be prepared to be fearless – in spite of resistance and criticism – to join the side of the suffering.

- We are furthermore called to follow Christ’s example by word and deed to accept people living with HIV and Aids as our brothers and sisters, and to refrain from a spirit of condemnation, discrimination and stigmatisation. We must hold this conviction before our congregants (followers).

- The church, its leaders and all believers are urged by the requirements of the Scriptures to show compassion towards the destitute – in this case people living with HIV and Aids – through the love of Christ and in obedience to God. We must therefore become involved with campaigns and programmes that are preventative, treating and caring by nature and that motivate our congregants/followers by making an appeal to become involved.

Lastly, let us utilise this day to specifically focus on the Christian leaders in our church community and let us remind them what an important role they can play in leading, convincing
and motivating their congregants/believers to fearlessly become involved with the HIV and Aids pandemic, as it has already taken on alarming proportions in our country and the rest of the world. Amen

10. Meditative, responsive prayer

Leader: Lord, as church leaders and congregants we confess that in the past we didn’t always come forward to give stronger guidance with regard to assistance and care for those living with HIV and Aids.

Congregation: We too confess our neglect.

Leader: As leaders and congregation of the Lord, we commit ourselves to Christ’s example to fearlessly join the side of the suffering, in this case those living with HIV and Aids.

Congregation: We want to follow Christ’s example and once again identify with those suffering and affected by the Aids pandemic. Fill our hearts with sympathy, empathy and compassion.

Leader: As disciples of Christ, we as a congregation want to accept people living with HIV and Aids as our brothers and sisters.

Congregation: We commit ourselves to take care of them and to love them like Christ loves us, and to refrain from a spirit of condemnation, discrimination and stigmatisation.

Leader: Let us then solemnly pledge our word together as followers of Christ:

Congregation: As members of the body of Christ, in the Name of God we pledge to assure people living with HIV and Aids that they can rely on our Christian love, our care and protection. This is done on the basis of the words of our Lord in Matthew 25: “For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; a stranger and you welcomed me; naked and you clothed me; ill and you cared for me; in prison and you visited me.” We want to stay true to this pledge with the help of the Lord because Jesus also says “as far as you did this for the least of these brothers (and sisters) of mine, you did for Me.”

Leader: Go in peace and follow Jesus!

11. Dedication ceremony

The following is a proposal to call members to dedicate themselves to be a HIV and Aids friendly congregation.

The congregation must identify members (preferably the youth and deacons) to make a banner with the following message. (The banner must be large enough and have enough empty space where members can sign their names in support):

“Name of the congregation”

We are an HIV and Aids friendly Church
We stand where God stands, with all people living with HIV.

Add the HIV ribbon

When the church council enters the sanctuary on the Sunday when World Aids Day is celebrated two of them parade the banner in front of the procession. The banner must be held in such a way that everybody can read the message.

During the service time must be set aside that representatives from all the ministries and the church council can identify with the message by signing the banner. (The rest of the congregation can sign the banner after the worship service.)

The banner can be displayed permanently in the church as a reminder of the dedication to be a HIV and Aids friendly congregation.