

“Churches, Channels of Hope”

“Our Christian Response to the HIV and AIDS pandemic” **Guiding principles handout**

There are many images in Scripture that describe what it means to be a Christian in the world. Two well-known images are Jesus’ call to his disciples to be the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world” (Mat 5:13-16). Salt and light are strong symbols urging us to make a real difference in our societies. Where decay and death prevail, we should bring hope, healing and new life. In a world with many forms of darkness, Christians should be light bearers, bringing hope, truth and serving life itself.

To help us to form a better understanding of what it means to be followers of Christ as well as to give us practical advice, CABSAs compiled a number of guiding principles. These guiding principles are practical pointers that help us to remain faithful followers of Christ in the midst of a broken world.

The order of the guiding principles is not hierarchical, as they can be related to one another in many ways.

○ Our motivation: Compelled by the love of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14)

Although good principled motives will not prevent us from making mistakes, it will influence our attitudes and relationships. When the love of Christ, poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5), is our inspiration, it will help us to stay focussed and it will give us resilience when we encounter challenges.

○ Our service: Serving God in practical acts of love and compassion (James 1:27; Matthew 25:34-40)

The history of Christianity emphasises that helping people in need is central to our faith. It is reasonable to put our faith in, and worship of, God (into practical acts of service towards our neighbours (Rom 12:1-2). When we see the wonders of God’s creation and his salvation in Christ, we cannot but value the whole of human life.

○ Our identity: We are the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12)

The core that all Christians are the body of Christ is of great importance in the context of HIV and AIDS. When we forget this, we could easily distance ourselves from people and their needs. To remember that we are the body of Christ is to understand that we are already affected by HIV and AIDS – irrespective of our own HIV status. It will also help us to understand that all members of the body of Christ can continue to minister to each other.

○ Our attitude towards people: To accept as Christ accepted (Romans 15:7)

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the wonderful news of the unconditional love of God. “God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” Rom 5:8. There are numerous appeals in the New Testament for God’s children to reflect the love of their Father. When we forsake or condemn people because they do not conform to our norms and ideas we act contrary to God’s unconditional love.

○ **Our relationships: To uphold the dignity and worth of every human being** (Luke 8:43-48)

Once we understand that God created all human beings with immense value – and that Christ died for all of us – it should be reflected in an attitude of respect towards every individual. Our respect or lack thereof is demonstrated in our relationships. Relationships that reflect the example of Jesus will be life-giving, healing, beneficial and constructive towards the other person. It will be full of mercy and compassion. Therefore we need to challenge relationships – even those embedded in tradition or cultural practices – that are inhumane, unjust or oppressive.

○ **Our hope: To believe is to have hope** (1 Peter 1:3)

Our hope as Christians is grounded in God’s faithfulness. The many accounts of God’s faithfulness in the Bible culminate in the resurrection of Christ. Through our faith in the living Christ we have a living hope that carries us in times of problems and sufferings. Whilst the AIDS pandemic often takes away the hope of individuals and communities, we can bring real hope..

○ **Our search for answers and solutions: With wisdom of the Holy Spirit** (James 3:17)

To think that you have all the answers is not only presumptuous; it is an expression of arrogance and pride. As Christians we should be humble enough to acknowledge our need for more wisdom and better answers. We constantly need to be open to learn from others, search the Scriptures and to be sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

○ **Our responsibility: To break the silence by speaking the truth in love** (Ephesians 4:15)

To “keep your peace” in a situation where injustice, wrongdoing and discrimination prevails is to negate your responsibility. However, to declare “all truth” without any consideration for the people involved can be rude. Only when truth is accompanied by love can it help us to address what is wrong and to “plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness” (James 3:18 NLT).

○ **Our task: To be Christ's ambassadors** (2 Corinthians 5:20)

Through the ages Christians have realised that the message of the Gospel needs a truthful messenger. This is of vital importance in the context of HIV and AIDS with its complexities. Our words of preaching, teaching and praying need to be authenticated by love, compassion, care, and solidarity with those who suffer.

This document has been made available
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