Guidelines for AIDS Memorial
Sunday, 20 May 2007

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Dear Sister / Brother in the service of our Lord

Re: AIDS Memorial Day 2007

We greet you in the Name of Jesus Christ. We hope that this letter finds you in good health and spirit.

The AIDS Task Team of the DRC and URCSA in the Western Cape in collaboration with CABSA prepared guidelines for AIDS Memorial Day 2007. These are being distributed with the full knowledge and support of the United Ministry for Service and Witness of the DRC family.

AIDS Memorial 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 need to consider the following:

What is the message I am conveying with my words – or by my silence? Do my neighbours and the congregants who are living with HIV find understanding or rejection in me? AIDS Memorial Day is an opportunity to communicate the love of God. Let us prepare ourselves in time to articulate and demonstrate the love of Christ towards people living with HIV and AIDS on Sunday, 20 May 2007.

We pray that the guidelines in this booklet will assist you and your congregation to spread a message of hope, love and reconciliation on this Sunday and during 2007.

Sincerely

Prof P Meiring (chairman), DR Church Rev Jimmy de Wet (vicechair), URCSA
2. Background

AIDS Memorial Day (or AMD – also called “International AIDS Candlelight Memorial”) is probably less known than World AIDS Day (1 December). Still, AIDS Memorial Day originated earlier. The first opportunity was in 1983. Its being linked to a particular Sunday from early times gave it an ecclesiastical character. Today, the initiative is managed by the Global Health Council. Information can be found on the Internet at http://www.candlelightmemorial.org/. AIDS Memorial Day takes place worldwide on the 3rd Sunday of May. The theme for this year is “Leading the Way to a World Without AIDS”.

Particularly because the day falls on a Sunday, it is a day with which churches and congregations can identify. It concerns much more than the “lighting of candles”. The name “memorial day” gives us the day to focus on the impact of HIV and AIDS in the lives of individuals as well as congregations and communities. It is an opportunity that all Christians can use to demonstrate practically that all of us are affected by the AIDS pandemic.

“If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it” (1 Cor 12:26).

AIDS Memorial Sunday focuses our attention on the reality that AIDS is a pandemic that cuts short people’s lives. For many, to die of an AIDS-related disease meant being rejected by their community (sometimes even family)! It is still happening! Therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge the full human dignity of those who have died like this.

For Christians who know the Father of Jesus Christ, AIDS Memorial Sunday will be more than a day of commemoration of the deceased. For us, there will also be memories of salvation, consolation and healing. For followers of Jesus Christ, this day will bear the stamp of hope. AIDS Memorial Sunday happens especially on a Sunday – the day in the week that proclaims the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ! This year (2007), it takes place on the seventh Sunday of Easter (the Sunday after Ascension Day).

The suggestions that follow were compiled by the Executive Committee of the AIDS Task Group of the Combined Commission for Diaconate of the Dutch Reformed Church (Western and Southern Cape) and the UR Church (Cape) in co-operation with CABSA (the AIDS Bureau – project of the Huguenot College). The guidelines are not a complete church service, but serve as an aid for the planning of a church service.

More information about HIV and AIDS can be obtained from the AIDS Bureau, or by visiting the website at www.cabsa.co.za, or by contacting the office at (021) 873 0028, or by e-mail to management@cabsa.co.za.

Remember: Somebody who lives with HIV is not “infested”, is not a “victim”, is not a “great sinner”, is not “unbelieving”. Avoid expressions like “AIDS sufferer” or “people have AIDS”.

Rather always refer to “people who live with HIV.”
3. **Tips for preparing and presenting the liturgical programme**

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


- Arrange that the placards are pasted in the church building before the church service on 20 May. Persons could also stand around in front of the church doors before the church service as if in a kind of “peaceful protest”. The information on the placards must appeal to the congregation in advance and make them consider: Can we distance ourselves from the AIDS pandemic?

4. **Hymns**

Congregations have different preferences about hymns. Therefore persons who plan the service should choose appropriate hymns or songs.

- From the DRC “Liedboek”
  - Lied 203: 1, 2, 5
  - Lied 250: 1, 2
  - Lied 486: 1, 3, 4
  - Lied 523: 1, 3, 4

- From the URCSA “Nuwe Sionsgesange”
  - SG 18 verse 1-4
  - SG 270 verse 1, 4
  - SG 246 verse 1-3
  - SG 233

- From the Hosana (Xhosa)
  - 30 Yinceba engakanani na?
  - 160 Njengoko ndinjalo, Nkosi
  - 161 Mabeze bonk’ abantu
  - 295 Singabazalwana
  - 391(2) Noba imekw’ iyaxina
5. Statement for AIDS Memorial Sunday

The following statement is a way in which church leadership can communicate on AIDS Memorial Sunday.

When going to print with these guidelines the statement had already been endorsed by the Moderamen of the Synod of the DR Church Western and Southern Cape and the Synod of the URCSA Cape.

We identify with people who are living with HIV and AIDS, as well as those who are directly affected by it. We share their fears, struggles, questions, longings, suffering and grief.

We ask church members to:

- accept with priestly compassion those who are living with HIV and AIDS as our brothers and sisters, and
- refrain from a spirit of judgement, discrimination and stigmatisation.

In the body of Christ there are no inferior members – we are all precious to Him.

Furthermore, church members are encouraged to become involved in actions and programmes that are committed to providing care and to the prevention of the AIDS pandemic.

We pray that we as a church will be the hands and feet of Christ in the midst of HIV and AIDS. That we will be the shoulder on which those who are weak and those who grieve will be able to lean. That our hands will be able to lift, feed, nourish and strengthen.

The church is now called to be witnesses for God: witnesses of his love, forgiveness, grace, life, truth, wisdom, compassion, comfort and hope!

We hope that other church leaders at different levels will follow suit.

A statement may be made in the following manner: The ……… (Church council/Presbytery/ Moderamen) makes – in solidarity with all church leaders who have the interests of our brothers and sisters at heart, and in view of AIDS Memorial Sunday on 20 May 2007 – the following statement: {The statement above may be use freely}. 


6. The reality of HIV and AIDS

Testimony: “This is how HIV and AIDS affects me”

If somebody is available to tell about his or her experience of living with HIV, or if somebody can share what it means to lose an HIV+ family member through death, it will have a great impact on the service. These testimonies must be managed with great circumspect, however! (Wrong management can contribute to stigmatising of HIV and AIDS).

Arrange with the person long in advance and make sure before the service that the person is emotionally ready to speak.

Make sure that there are no misunderstandings regarding an honorarium. (To some persons it can make a substantial difference to receive financial support in return).

Do not introduce the person as “HIV+”. Let the person tell it in his/her own words on the occasion. (Rather introduce the person as merely somebody who will tell how HIV has affected his/her life).

Usually two narratives are more than sufficient. Rather allow one or two the opportunity to speak a little longer than try to let more people speak within a limited time.

OR: Bible passages that can help us understand a life with HIV better

It is not essential that somebody tell how HIV affects him or her. When nobody is available (or it is preferred not to allow such an opportunity), the following pericopes can be read.

The pericopes can be introduced by pointing out that although HIV and AIDS were unknown in Biblical times (it is known for the past 25 years), honest and sincere descriptions of the struggles of believers with the sorrow and suffering of life are found in the Bible. There are many circumstances in which people can still identify with these descriptions today. The three passages that we read can help us understand how somebody living with HIV might feel when things are going badly, when God’s grace is experienced and when new meaning in life is discovered.

Psalms 31:9-16

Isaiah 38:9-20

Psalms 16:1-11
7. Prayer for Love, Hope and Compassion

Leader: O God, Teach us how to love, how to hope, and compassion for Life.

Leader: We pray for healing.

All: We pray that you lay your hands on our mothers, fathers, daughters and sons. We pray that you touch our lives with your presence, your love, and your grace. We pray that you heal our hearts and minds with the gift of Life.

We pray that you heal your church. We pray that you touch our hearts, minds, and souls with your compelling hand of truth. We pray that you heal our fear, our anxiety, and our prejudice that we might live lives of faith, hope, and love to touch our brothers and sisters living with HIV and AIDS or who are directly affected by it.

Leader: We pray for salvation.

All: We pray that you lift us up from the reality of pain, horror, and disease. We pray that you offer the gift of salvation for those who are dying, for those already dead. We pray for the living, that you bless them with Hope in the light of Love.

We pray for doctors, nurses, caregivers, and researchers. We pray that you offer them wisdom, compassion, and faith. We pray that you bless them with an intellect to boldly imagine a world without AIDS, a vision for a new generation of medical care, and an unconditional love for those who need treatment.

Leader: We pray for support.

All: We pray that you will comfort us in our time of need. We pray that you will provide food for the hungry, clothes for the naked, a home for the homeless, and medical treatment for those who cannot afford such a luxury. We pray that you will provide your orphans with good families that will raise them in love.

We pray for our governments, our pharmaceutical companies, our corporations, and our religious communities. We pray that each institution finds it in their hearts and minds to offer monetary support by way of funding, medical treatments, and community-oriented aid.

Leader: We pray for compassion.

All: We pray that you rain compassion on our community. We pray that you instill in the hearts of complacent people an understanding of the mental, physical, social, and emotional needs of people living with HIV and AIDS or those dying with AIDS. We pray compassion on the cold hearts of those who cling to ignorance and indifference. We pray for compassion on those who are compelled to combat the virus. We pray for compassion for the world as we attempt to wage a war against a deadly disease that is killing our brothers and sisters. We pray for compassion for Life itself.

All: O God, Hear our prayer in the Name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen

Theme:

The congregation is a new community that care for one another and brings healing.

Guidelines for a sermon:

- In Mat 25:34 we find a fine word from the prophetic speech of Jesus to his followers about the final judgement:

  “Come, you that are blessed by my Father!”

  Amongst others, the word refers to the blessed that will inherit the Kingdom and can claim eternal life because they are doing the will of God.

  Amongst others, according to Mat 25:35-36, the will of God involves becoming involved in a broken world.

  In this text, the contours of the broken world are described as those who are hungry and thirsty, the stranger without accommodation, those who are naked and those who are sick and in prison.

  It is there where the Kingdom breaks through! Often it is the everyday circumstances to which we have become accustomed easily and that we do not notice anymore. Here especially, the “blessed” serve on the basis of the constitution of the Kingdom. Here, the King’s children are like salt for all mankind and light for the whole world.

- In Mat 25:40, Jesus continues by stating: “...whenever you did this for one of the least important of these brothers of mine...”

  It becomes clear that the blessed are the neighbour of the least important, as Jesus teaches in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). The Good Samaritan becomes the neighbour of the person in distress.

  This is the aim of our lives as believers: the interests of our neighbour. Of this, Jesus is an example to us.

  This is also the meaning of our life: service to our neighbour and to be available. This is what Math 6:33 means: Through service to our neighbour we are seeking the Kingdom and its justice. In this way, our faith becomes a “life in love”, because our faith is not a matter for the heart, the mind or the mouth. It is more than comforting words, sermons or testimonies. To believe means to accept responsibility for another of whom I have become a neighbour.

  Within the context of the AIDS pandemic, Christians must become neighbours for those living with HIV, like it comes to the fore in the parable of the Good Samaritan. For this reason, the stigma must be fought.

  For many, sins that involve sex are “bigger sins”. Stigma thrives on these ideas. Very often, HIV and AIDS then become symbols of “those who have committed sex sins”, but according to Mat 25, the blessed are those who have noticed the ill, strangers and people in prisons as their neighbours.
Notice must be taken of what Jesus says: “...I was...”

This means that he, the Lord Jesus, takes interest in our broken world and associates himself with the sufferer.

Jesus continues by stating that if we reach out to the least important, we actually do it for him: “...you did it for me.”

This means the Lord is present with and in the sufferers. The Lord is present in my neighbour! A well-known author, Anton van Niekerk, puts it as follows: “In the one of whom I have become a neighbour, I see, if I observe closely enough, the image, the face of God himself. ...In him we see the true God and the true person – the person we ought to be, and the norm for humanity that we must restore in a world from which it has disappeared. This is true religion. This is true faith; Christian faith...”

Also in the church and congregation

To this point we can agree heartily, but still miss an important point: We may think that all this involves our relationship as church people or Christians with people out there or the non-Christians. The reality, however, is that HIV and AIDS is a reality in the church and among us. When Jesus, our King, says in Mat 25 that we must be involved in the need of people, it actually means that we must reach out and step over our man-made boundaries to become a neighbour of others. It also means we must be prepared to be the neighbour of somebody who perhaps is very close to me: my fellow member, my fellow Christian who is living with HIV and AIDS. And let us be honest: often it is more difficult to be the neighbour of my fellow Christian than to help a stranger in distress.

Therefore, it is necessary to consider Paul’s guidelines for being neighbours within the congregation. He refers to this in Romans 15:1-7, where he also highlights the following:

- In the congregation, the strong and the weak find one another (verse 1).
- In the congregation, the interests of others are more important than my own (verse 2).
- In the congregation, there is harmony (verse 5).
- In the congregation, everyone is accepted (verse 7)!

The background, against which Paul is writing these things, is the situation of a congregation that is also broken like the world, in which the congregation is situated, was broken. The brokenness of the world (the shortages that still revealed themselves in the lives of Christians) negatively influenced relationships in this congregation, and Paul warns against this. Paul calls upon the congregation to accept one another as believers, to be considerate towards one another, to support one another. In this way, we show that the congregation is a new community. Here, there is care for one another and healing is possible.

Today, with AIDS Memorial Day, we as church, as members, as Christians can say to each other: Remember that we are living in a broken world. Let us not forget that we as church and congregation are living with HIV and AIDS at this time. Let us remember that there are people in distress who are suffering, who have been hurt, who have faltered, who have sinned, who have been wronged, who are among us – and that they need us. By being their neighbour, we serve Christ.

Let us use this day to consider with churches all over the world that so many have already died
due to this pandemic. In particular, let us think of people who have lost loved ones who died due to the pandemic. Let us also think of so many who will be deeply affected by it today and tomorrow. Let us pray for one another and accept one another unconditionally. Let us be together in close fellowship and carry each other’s burdens. Let us be neighbours to one another.

Amen.

9. Prayer of Devotion and Commitment

Loving God and Father -

We are approaching you on this day of commemoration.

We are praying for so many who have died from HIV and AIDS and many who are living with HIV and AIDS every day, and still more who are affected by it.

Thank you for your love and your faithfulness under all circumstances.

In a broken world, you are calling your church to be like salt for all mankind and light for the whole world.

You call upon us to erect signs of your Kingdom

- to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God (Micah 6:8),
- by living in obedience to you, in peace and joy that the Holy Spirit gives us (Rom 14:17),
- by practising justice, mercy and honesty (Mat 23:23).

Help us to offer love, acceptance, forgiveness and solace to broken people.

Help us to be a safe haven where there is hope and healing.

Under the guidance of your Spirit, we commit ourselves as church

- to be the hands and feet of Christ in the midst of HIV and AIDS,
- to be the shoulder on which the weak and the sorrowful can lean,
- to be the hands that can pick up, feed, refresh and strengthen.

So that your Kingdom may come

your Name be hallowed

and your will be done

Amen
The ten commandments of HIV/AIDS Struggle

Preamble: I am the Lord your God, the creator of heaven and earth; the creator of all life forms in the earth community. I created all life and I created it good. In this HIV/AIDS era, I have seen the misery of my people, who are infected and affected by this disease; I have heard their cry on the account of this epidemic. I know their sufferings and I have come down to deliver them from HIV/AIDS. So come, I will send you to the infected and affected, to bring my people, my creation, out of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Now, therefore, these are the ten commandments of the HIV/AIDS struggle for liberation:

Commandment 1: Life and HIV/AIDS Prevention

You shall remember, proclaim and act on the fact that, I am the Lord your God who created all people and all life and created life very good (Gen 1-2). You shall, therefore, seriously and effectively undertake HIV/AIDS prevention for all people - Christians and non-Christians, married and single, young and old, women and men, poor and rich, black, white yellow, all people everywhere - for this disease destroys life and its goodness, thus violating God’s creation and will.

Commandment 2: Love and HIV/AIDS Care

You shall remember, proclaim and act on the fact that love is from God and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their sisters and brothers are liars, for unless you love your sisters and brothers whom you see, you cannot love God whom you have never seen (I John 4:7-21). You shall, therefore, do all that is necessary and within your power to encourage both men and women to love, care, support and heal all those who are infected and affected by HIV/AIDS in your communities, countries and continent.

Commandment 3: Treatment and HIV/AIDS Drugs

You shall remember, proclaim and act on the fact that the earth and everything in it belongs to me and that I have given it over to all human beings for custodianship (Ps. 24:1; Gen.1:29). You shall, therefore, openly and persistently undertake prophetic and advocacy role for all the infected who are denied access to affordable HIV/AIDS drugs until anti-retroviral are available to all who need them.

Commandment 4: Compassion, HIV/AIDS Stigma & Discrimination

You shall remember, proclaim and act on the fact that I am the Lord your God, the compassionate God, who calls upon you to be compassionate, to suffer with those who suffer, to enter their places and hearts of pain and to seek lasting change of their suffering (Luke 6:36; Matt 25:31-46). You shall, therefore, have zero tolerance for HIV/AIDS stigma and discrimination and do all that is necessary to eliminate the isolation, rejection, fear and oppression of the infected and affected in your communities. You shall declare HIV/AIDS stigma and discrimination an unacceptable sin before God and all believers and in all your communities.
Commandment 5: Poverty and HIV/AIDS

You shall remember, proclaim and act on the fact that I am the Lord your God, who created all the resources of the earth, blessed both women and men and gave them the resources of the earth for their sustenance (Gen1:28-29). You shall, therefore, work to empower the poor and denounce all the cultural, national and international structures, laws and policies that have condemned billions to poverty, thus denying them their God given rights and, in the HIV/AIDS era, exposing them to infection and denying them quality care and treatment.

Commandment 6: Gender Inequalities and HIV/AIDS

You shall remember, proclaim and act on the fact that I am the Lord your God, who created humankind in my image. In my image, I created them male and female, I blessed them both and gave both of them leadership and resources in the earth; I made them one in Christ (Gen 1:27-29; Gal 3:28-29). You shall, therefore, denounce gender inequalities that have lead men to risky behavior, domination and violence; that deny women leadership, decision making, property ownership thus exposing them to violence, witchcraft accusation, widow dispossession, survival sex and fueling HIV/AIDS infection and lack of quality care and treatment.

Commandment 7: Children and HIV/AIDS

You shall remember, proclaim and act on the fact that, I am the Lord your God who welcomes children. I have given my kingdom to them and I am the father of all orphans (Mark 9:33-37, 10:13-16; Ps. 68:5; Ps. 146:9). You shall, therefore, work to empower and protect all children and denounce all the national and international structures, cultures, policies, laws and practices that expose children to sexual abuse and exploitation, HIV/AIDS stigma and discrimination, dispossession and poverty thus exposing them to HIV/AIDS infection and lack of quality care.

Commandment 8: Church, PLWAs and HIV/AIDS

You shall remember, proclaim and act on the fact that you are one body of Christ and if one member suffers, you all suffer together with it; that I am the Lord your God who identifies with the suffering and marginalized and heals the sick (1 Cor. 14: 26; Matt 25:31-46). You shall, therefore, become a community of compassion and healing, a safe place for all PLWAs to live openly and productively with their status.

Commandment 9: Human Sexuality and HIV/AIDS

You shall remember, proclaim and act on the fact that I am the Lord your God, who created human sexuality and created it good (Gen. 2:18-25). You shall, therefore, test for infection, denounce sexual violence, abstain before marriage, be faithful in marriage and practice protected sex to avoid HIV/AIDS infection and plunder on life, for all life is sacred to me and prevention should be seriously pursued to protect life.

Commandment 10: Justice and HIV/AIDS

You shall remember, proclaim and act on the fact that I am the Lord your God, who sees, hears, knows the suffering of my people and who comes down to liberate them (Ex 3:1-12; Luke 4:16-22). You shall, therefore, declare the jubilee and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land and to all its inhabitants (Lev. 25:10), for unless and until justice is served to all people in the world, until justice...
rolls down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream, HIV/AIDS cannot be uprooted.

(This article has been written by Dr. Musa Dube. It can be downloaded from http://www.umc-gbcs.org/site/apps/nl/content2.asp?c=fsJNK0PKJrH&b=1048921&content_id=%7b33154F4E-10BE-4A0D-8512-4944BC5B206F%7d&notoc=1)