

Order of service for World AIDS Day 2017

The lives and rights of children and adolescents living with HIV

Before the service begins, create a large red ribbon with candles where people can see it. Then distribute an order of service to each congregation member as they enter the worship space.

World AIDS Day, observed on 1 December each year, is an important opportunity when governments, national AIDS programs, faith and community organizations, and individuals around the world bring attention to the global AIDS epidemic and emphasize the critical need for a committed, meaningful and sustained response.



Words of welcome

Welcome to our World AIDS Day service. This is a time when we remember the people we have lost, we give thanks for the progress we have made and commit ourselves anew to ensuring that no one is left behind. This year we want to pray for and with children and adolescents: so that no child will be born with HIV; children and adolescents will stay free from HIV; and those who are living with HIV will have their rights fulfilled.

Children, adolescents and HIV: A justice issue

Much has been achieved since AIDS was first identified over three decades ago. However, among the 2.1 million children aged 0-14 who are now living with HIV, less than half are receiving the treatment they need. Without treatment,

half of children with HIV will die by their second birthday. A critical reason for the low treatment coverage is the low detection rates. Globally in 2016, only 43 percent of HIV-exposed infants received the recommended diagnostic test within the first two months of life.

Adolescents and young people represent a growing share of people living with HIV worldwide, and HIV is the second largest cause of adolescent deaths globally. In 2016, 260,000 adolescents aged 15-19 were newly infected with HIV. Only 13 percent of adolescent girls and 9 percent of adolescent boys aged 15-19 in sub-Saharan Africa have been tested for HIV in the past 12 months and received the result of the last test. No test result means no access to treatment!

As people of faith we cannot remain indifferent to the 438 children who are newly infected with HIV each day and to the 328 children who die of AIDS-related causes daily. We cannot remain silent knowing that many adolescents do not receive proper information about HIV and AIDS and knowing that all these infections and deaths are entirely avoidable!

Gathering song

The service opens with the lightening of candles of hope. Ask participants to light candles and place them to create a large red ribbon.

Call to worship

Gracious loving Father,

Today we pray for the 5 million children who have died from AIDS-related illnesses since the start of the HIV epidemic. We pray for those living with, or affected by, HIV and for their loved ones. We pray to receive strength and courage to fight injustice and inequalities, as we know that all these infections and deaths would be preventable, if only HIV testing and treatment could be accessible to all, including those living in poor settings.

Forgive us, Lord, if we do not always stand up against a system that perpetuates injustice. Show us how we can serve your children. If we are to see a day when there are zero AIDS-related deaths, zero new HIV infections and zero discrimination, guide us, oh Lord, to work together to ensure that the practical efforts, political will and financial commitments continue.

As we give thanks for what has been achieved, we commit ourselves anew to doing all we can to make sure that no one is left behind.

Amen

**“Let the children come to me... for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven”
(Mt 19:14).**

Prayer: God of all nations

Voice 1: God of all the nations, so many of your children are crying out to you, worn down by injustice and suffering.

Voice 2: Help us to fulfil our goal of helping to make real the vision that Christ spoke of as ‘the kingdom of God’, where justice reigns.

Voice 3: Help us to foster compassion, one for another, tolerating damage to no one and oppression by no system.

Voice 4: As we remember those living with HIV at this time, may we use all our energy and imagination, trusting in your steadfast love, to be united in conquering disease and fear.

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The little river girl

My life seems like a river. I love rivers. I like swimming in the river. Every time I swim, I feel very happy.

My house was near a river, so I was lucky to have been able to swim often with my two younger sisters and one elder brother. All of us were so happy.

Unfortunately, I got sick since I am HIV positive. It made me so weak. I couldn't swim anymore. I had to watch others swimming.(...) The river gives many benefits to living and non-living things. We can use the water to help us to keep things clean. I always thought that I would like to remain a long time in the river and use the water to take a bath in order to remove the virus from my body, like the river washes my clothes clean.

Water can only clean my clothes, but not my virus. I felt so sad and ashamed. I did not want anyone to know that I was HIV positive. I hated it when I was getting sick, with a fever, cough and headache. It made me suffer. I don't want to die young so I have to take some medicines against the virus every day. Today I am very happy at the Center because I have a chance to swim in the sea and in a swimming pool. However, the happiest thing in my life is to go to school with other children (...) I want to have a chance to improve and develop the same as others.

This little river girl was born in Chonburi.

*10 Years old, Little River Girl,
Camillian Child Care Center, Rayong -
Thailand*

Music

Reading

Mark 9: 33-37

33 They came to Capernaum and, once inside the house, he began to ask them, “What were you arguing about on the way?”

34 But they remained silent. They had been discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest.

35 Then he sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.”

36 Taking a child he placed it in their midst, and putting his arms around it he said to them,

37 “Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me.”

Reflection: Who is the Greatest?

The question the disciples argued about - ‘who is the greatest’ - echoes in our world.

“Who is the greatest” echoes in the chambers of the European Union and the United Nations, but also in the boardrooms of mining houses and corporations, and maybe also in the project discussions of not-for-profit organizations.

“Who is the greatest” shows in who get the most attention when donors visit a project.

“Who is the greatest” is reflected in our focus of time, of energy, of resources.

“Who is the greatest” determines who has a seat at the table when important discussions are held and decisions are made.

“Who is the greatest” drives the inflated salaries of business moguls, politicians and even some NGO leaders.

We tend to react like the disciples when we think about “who is the greatest”.

Jesus however turned “who is the greatest” upside down. In responding to the disciple’s argument, He gave a totally illogical response. He spoke about being the very least, and the servant of all. He went even further and spoke about a child.

In verse 37 we read: *“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”* (NIV)

In the time of Jesus, young children were not seen as precious and pampered as we often see today. In fact, children were viewed as the least valuable member of society. Yet, Jesus equated welcoming these little ones with welcoming Him, and even welcoming God, the One who sent Him.

If I look at the images on my TV screen I want to weep.

I wonder what Jesus would have said about the unceasing line of refugee children that walk and are carried across my TV screen.

I wonder what Jesus would have said about the body of a child lying on a Turkish beach, and the arguments and controversy after his photo was published world-wide.

I wonder what Jesus would have said about millions of children in the camps in Lebanon and Jordan.

I wonder what Jesus would have said about the malnourished children in Somalia, on the tea plantations in India, and in our own country.

I wonder what Jesus would have said about the village council in India that ordered that two sisters should be gang-raped as punishment after their brother eloped with a married woman.

I wonder what Jesus would have said about the 15 million girls younger than 18 who are married in a year.

I wonder what Jesus would have said about the 5 million children aged 0-14 who have died from AIDS-related illnesses since the start of the HIV epidemic.

I wonder what Jesus would have said about the fact that of the 2.1 million children aged 0-14 who are now living with HIV, but only half of them is receiving the treatment needed to live a long and healthy life

I wonder what Jesus would have said about the fact that globally in 2015, only 47 percent of HIV-exposed infants received the recommended diagnostic test within the first two months of life.

I wonder what Jesus would have said about how we welcome these children, and through them, how we welcome Him, and the One Who sent Him?

To think about: What would the world look like if we took Jesus' words seriously?

*Written by Lyn van Rooyen for CABS Weekly
Bible Message in a time of HIV (adapted)*

Prayer for children

To play, to learn, to have food and health.

To be loved, secure and safe.

These are the rights of every child, rights robbed by a virus and robbed twice over in countries crippled by debt and paralysed by trade rules designed to benefit the rich and powerful

Loving God, vanquish our complacency at our injustice to these your children.

Remove all traces of empty conscience-salving charity.

Make us, instead, committed to sharing our resources – your resources – with those who need them most;

to seeking in justice to remove the debt burdens of the poorest,

to working tirelessly

so that all your children might know again

the joys of playing, learning, living,

loving and being loved.

Prayer prepared by CAFOD

Music

Reading

Matthew 2:13- 23

The Flight to Egypt.

13 * When they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt,* and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.”

14 Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt.

15 * He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

The Massacre of the Infants.

16 When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the magi, he became furious. He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had ascertained from the magi.

17 Then was fulfilled what had been said through Jeremiah the prophet:

18 “A voice was heard in Ramah,
sobbing and loud lamentation;
Rachel weeping for her children,
and she would not be consoled,
since they were no more.”

The Return from Egypt.

19 When Herod had died, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt

20 and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.”*

21 He rose, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel.

22 But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod,* he was afraid to go back there. And because he had been warned in a dream, he departed for the region of Galilee.

23 He went and dwelt in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He shall be called a Nazorean.”

Reflection: Arise and Act Father! Arise and Act Mother! Arise and Act Protector!

God calls us to rise and act! God cares for children. He does not want them to be harmed. We discover that Joseph receives serious warning of impending danger to the child, Jesus. An angel of the Lord appears to him in an intense and emergent dream. Joseph is called into prompt or urgent action. He needs to arise and act immediately to ensure that his family remains safe. The message is clear: Get up and go Joseph! You are the protector of the child. Arise, take your family and get away as fast as you can, for Herod is seeking to kill the child. He is warned of the nature of the impending danger, is directed where to flee to, and is told of the exact time they should stay away (verse 13). The family finds refuge in Egypt, the place that has a history of bondage to Israel, and particular cruelty to the infants of Israel.

Later in the text, we read that Joseph is visited in a dream once again - to tell him to return to Israel - but is warned to go to Nazareth, to avoid Herod's son and to further ensure the protection of the child (verses 19-23).

As we reflect on this passage, with its emphasis on the dark world of unjust rulers, violence, private grief, personal pain, hope, faith, safety of the child and the important role of the protector, we realize the importance of viewing the position of the child and the protector through an objective lens. In many families today there is no father, but the mother or an older sibling serves as the protector of the children. We discover that not all of the children born across the globe are adequately protected: According to UNAIDS, an estimated 2.1 million children worldwide are living with HIV. Most of these children live in sub-Saharan Africa and were infected during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding, mainly because their mother had no access to treatment. Over 400 children become newly infected with HIV each day, despite preventative measures taken. Millions of children worldwide experience the worst kinds of rights violations, as they are constantly confronted with violence, child labour, human trafficking, sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation/cutting, and child marriages.

It is in light of the impending danger confronting children that all protectors are called to arise and act, because Jesus is present in the storm and He will calm the storm, bring healing and wholeness:

- God is ever present in dark and bleak situations and impending danger.
- God, when God pleases, can make the worst of places serve the best of purposes.
- God provides a hiding place for God's people.
- God highly regards the life and safety of the child.
- All care givers are called to arise and act for the protection and safety of the child.

So arise and act Father! Arise and act Mother! Arise and act Care giver! Lead the child out of pain into healing! Take the child out of the darkness into the Light! God does not cause evil, but is present in times of distress in the Voice guiding us, in the sending of us to safety, in the healing of our pain, and is ever present in our lives. God will hide you under God's wings. Amen.

To think about: So many babies are born HIV positive, so many children are victims of much pain and suffering. But Jesus is extending a life-line to you today: Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28).

*Reflection Written by Rev Jeconiah Plaatjies,
Director, Hephzibah Women's Wellness
Organization for CABSA Weekly Bible Message
in a time of HIV (adapted)*

Act of solidarity

This poem

(...) This poem will live in time
It is about those who have lost touch
with being human because all they do is
hurt innocent souls
One man's death doesn't even
diminish them
This poem

This poem will live in time
It is about how divided we are
It is about how lost our generation is
It is about how ignorant we are
We are ignorant to HIV/AIDS until it
happens to us
It is about how we judge each other
What happened to brotherhood and Sisterhood Unity
We live as if we are not tight
together in the single garment of destiny (...)

Written by Tebello Maseko – first year
student from Tsibogang Christian Action
Group Mafikeng

Today, challenged by the words of Tebello, we want to commit to live recognizing that we are “tight together in the single-garment of destiny.” We can choose among the actions listed below or suggest others:

- We commit to share facts about HIV with other people, in particular young people;
- We commit to write letters to Ministries of Health, Education and Finance of our countries, asking them to promote the rights of children and adolescents living with HIV;
- We commit to write about children, adolescents and HIV in our church newsletter, in a blog, or local journal;
- We commit to organize a panel discussion to mobilize action on the rights of children and adolescents living with HIV in our church;
- We commit to become Faith Paediatric HIV Champions¹ and speak up for the right of children and adolescents living with HIV to access to testing and treatment;

¹ If you want to become a Faith Paediatric HIV Champion, please read <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/diakonia/eaalive-the-promise/action-alert-become-a-champion-for-children>

- We commit to get an HIV test to ‘Know Your Status’;
- We commit to talk about the importance of HIV testing and treatment with friends, family members and colleagues.

Invite each member of the congregation to write their commitments on a piece of paper and to place it in a basket on the altar. Then ask each participant to wear a red ribbon symbol of the fight against AIDS and of our renewed commitments.

Closing prayer

Loving God, as we observe World AIDS Day we thank you for the multiple advances in care that has been made over the past 30 years. We remember our brothers and sisters that have succumbed to the disease.

We pray for all those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS who remain consigned to the margins. Provide comfort for them and remove the isolation and fear that creeps in and envelopes them. Help them to remember that You love them just as they are, and that You are always there beside them, watching over them and guiding them.

We ask that you break down the barriers of stigma and shame that leads to this isolation and fear. Help us to examine the intersections between poverty, immigration, class, race, sexism and other “isms” that contribute to new diagnoses.

Give us the courage to confront these issues and their intersectionality and “live as people who are free, not using our freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.” Amen

*Prayer Written by Dr David Williams,
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& Global Program Officer/Coordinator
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Music