



The theme of the 2008 World AIDS Day is “*Leadership: ‘Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise’*”. This year marks the 20th anniversary of World AIDS Day. Since 1988, the face and response to AIDS has greatly changed. While many of these changes are positive, this anniversary offers an opportunity to highlight how much more still needs to be done. Leadership encourages leaders at all levels to stop AIDS. Building on the 2006 theme of accountability, leadership highlights the discrepancy between the commitments that have been made to halt the spread of AIDS, and actions taken to follow them through. Leadership empowers everyone – individuals, organisations, governments – to lead in the response to AIDS. (World AIDS Campaign website: www.worldaidscampaign.org)

“Leadership: ‘Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise’ Worship Service

Call to Worship: (bold type for congregation)

Someone is coming...

We are waiting....

Someone is coming to grant dignity to long-suffering bodies...

We are waiting....

Someone is coming to the breathless...

We are waiting....

Someone is coming to those who lack energy...

We are waiting....

Someone is coming to those who grow thinner day by day...

We are waiting....

Someone is coming to those who don't know if their hands will work tomorrow...

We are waiting....

Someone is coming to those who have neither mother nor father...

We are waiting....

Someone is coming to those who cannot get medicine...

We are waiting....

Someone is coming who cares and who puts their care into action...

We are waiting....

Hymn *God of Grace and God of Glory* #577 United Methodist Hymnal

Prayer

Almighty God, we could easily be overwhelmed by despair and hopelessness in view of the uncertainty that most nations on our continent face due to impending political change; by the knowledge that essential African traditions and culture are being destroyed as populations are forced to gravitate to urban shanty towns; by the realization of the enormity of the consequences of AIDS to the coming generation, and by the desperation and despondency of our youth facing perpetual unemployment. We pray for your intervention. You are our Hope, our only Hope.

(Dave Grogan, Zambia)

Song and Prayer

Sung: She is crying Lord, Kumba Yah.

Spoken: She is crying Lord, somewhere,
She is millions, somewhere in many places.
There are tears of suffering
There are tears of weakness and disappointment
There are tears of strength and resistance
There are tears of the rich, and the tears of the poor.
She is crying, Lord, redeem the times.

Sung: She is shouting Lord, Kumba Yah.

Spoken: She is shouting out loudly and clearly.
She has made a choice,
She stands up against the times
She is shouting out, offering her life in love and anger
To fight the death that surrounds us,
To wrestle with the evils with which we crucify each other.
She is shouting, Lord, redeem the times.

Sung: She is praying Lord, Kumba Yah.

Spoken: She is praying Lord.
We are praying in tears and anger,
In frustration and weakness, in strength and endurance.
We are shouting and wrestling to be touched, marked, blessed.
We are praying, Lord.
Spur our imagination.
Sharpen our will.
She is praying, Lord, redeem the times.

Sung: Kumba Yah, my Lord, Kumba Yah.

Prayer: Through Jesus Christ you have let us know where you want us to be. Help us to be there now. Be with us, touch us, mark us, let us be a blessing. Let your power be present in our weakness. Amen. Amen. Amen. (International Women's Day, World Student Christian Federation)

Scripture:

Isaiah 53: 3-9

He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account. Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his

future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. (New Revised Standard Version)

Scope of this Pandemic:

- At the end of 2007, approximately 33.2 million adults and children were living with HIV/AIDS in the world: 30.8 million adults and 2.5 children under 15 years of age.
- During 2007, an estimated 2.5 million people became newly infected with HIV, including approximately 420,000 children.
- In the United States, approximately 984,000 people have been diagnosed with AIDS.
- Worldwide, 2.1 million people died of AIDS in 2007; 330,000 were children under 15 years of age.
- By the end of 2005, the epidemic had left behind 15.2 million AIDS orphans,
- Worldwide, most people living with HIV are unaware that they are infected.
- Approximately, one half of all new HIV infections are women.

(Statistics from www.UNAIDS.org and www.cdc.gov)

Gospel Reading:

Luke 18: 2-7

He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.' And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them?" (New Revised Standard Version)

Hymn:

Holy Spirit, Come, Confirm Us #331 United Methodist Hymnal

Listening to the Stories

On a trip to Mozambique in 2002, I visited a clinic for children with AIDS. I met a nine year old girl who had AIDS and was hospitalized for a secondary, yet serious infection (not uncommon). She was quite severely emaciated with a hollow look in her eyes. Her mom was sitting next to her, and we began talking. Her mom painfully told me that her daughter kept asking her "What have I done wrong to be sick?" The mom was devastated. She told her daughter that it was not her daughter's fault knowing that she (the mom) had passed on the HIV virus through birth. What shame the mom expressed. That tender moment of sharing between a mother and daughter was transforming – one act of loving kindness calmed her daughter down for at least a while. We're all called to practice love. The world counts on our leadership to do nothing less. It's not too late. (Linda Bales, General Board of Church & Society)

Silent Prayer

Diagnosed HIV positive in 1988, I went public in 1990 out of desperation that no other women were speaking out. I hid the secret of my boyfriend and myself for one year, until he died. His death was my first experience of what this horrible virus can do; devouring him and countless friends since then. I drank heavily and tried suicide; wanting to get my 'death-wish' over. I pushed friends away, and my family didn't know how to respond. In 1990, I attended the West

Ohio UM AIDS Ministry Healing Weekend. Persons let go of past torments and find a future, even while living with HIV and AIDS. Miracles continue to happen at safe places like this event. Two healing weekends a year proved to be life-altering. Persons let go of past torments and find a future, even while living with HIV and AIDS. (Sharon Thomas, "Circuit Rider", July/August 2007)

Silent Prayer

Many people living with HIV and AIDS distance themselves from God because they think they are sinners, failures in life. But I take my HIV status as a sign of something I need to do or change. The cry of my heart is a cure for HIV and AIDS worldwide. The community, friends, and family sometimes discriminate against and discourage us who are HIV-positive. Friends may avoid us because they think that people will assume they are also HIV-positive if they are seen with us. Family members may push us away because they believe our HIV status lowers the family's dignity. Yet, I have hope. God saved South Africa during apartheid and the time of bloodshed among our people. We prayed for peace during elections, and there was peace. God is with us, and God's presence can bring miracles. We who are HIV positive can forgive, forget, stop pointing fingers and refuse to retaliate in anger toward those who discriminate and belittle. This is the way of Christ. (Mathabo I. – South Africa, taken from "The Upper Room, Prayers for Encouragement")

Silent Prayer

Considering the resource implications of expansion of treatment and prevention access over at least the next decade, it should be clear by now that there's not "too much" money going to AIDS but "too little." It is in that context that the decision by US Congress to re-authorize PEPFAR [President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief] with 39 billion dollars for aids, and signed last Wednesday by President GW Bush, is a truly historic deed. The long overdue lifting of the law banning people living with HIV from entry into the United States is another terrific bonus..... Because let's be realistic. We've done the easy bit. If we thought the first phase was hard, we must be prepared for an even tougher time ahead. But it will be less tough if we work together – in a unified coalition. To quote the great Caribbean poet Bob Marley: "Get up, stand up, stand up for your right /Get up, stand up, don't give up the fight". That's what we will do. That's what I will do. Never give up the fight! (Dr. Peter Piot, Executive Director, UNAIDS, Speech at the opening of the XVIIth International AIDS Conference, Mexico, 3 August 2008)

Silent Prayer

A Call to Leadership: (Responsive Reading)

Cries for help haunt us, O God, and we know we cannot remain silent. We want to act, but sometimes feel paralyzed and helpless. We want to be compassionate but sometimes become caught up in our everyday living and simply forget. We want to accept those with HIV and AIDS, but too often fall prey to fear and anxiety.

Response: Help us to lead.

Men, women and children are dying daily as we sit in the comfort of our homes and offices. We pray for boldness and courage to move us from our complacency to doing at least one thing to make a difference. Let us be your servants, Creator God. Call us to faithfulness.

Response: Help us to lead.

Injustice surrounds us like a blanket on a cold day. It's so close to us, we can touch it. It's in our homes; it's in our churches; it's in our neighborhoods; it permeates our world. We see AIDS infected women who have no rights because they are held captive to unjust cultural practices. We hear of orphans, abandoned by parents, who walk aimlessly about as innocent victims. And we witness doctors leaving their AIDS-infected countries out of fear and exhaustion. Cries of mercy resound in abundance.

Response: Help us to lead.

We confess our indifference to those who suffer. Even when we recognize their pain and suffering, we do little to motivate our churches to make bold responses. We feel the stigma of standing up for this portion of the world's outcasts. Our behavior is intolerable, and we ask for forgiveness. We are diminished by each thought or action that stigmatizes another. You call us to be examples of love and compassion, and we want to be faithful.

Response: Help us to lead.

The widow takes on the judge until the judge grants her wish. Help us to be as persistent, O God, in ways that bring justice so all your children can live in peace and wholeness. Help us be outspoken by challenging those systems that keep people oppressed. May we be unrelenting advocates for healing and relief and call our governments to put in place policies that bring life rather than destroying it. And, may we be empowered to hear your call for action and choose to follow with all the strength we can muster – for your sake, Holy One, and for your creation.

Response: So be it. We will lead with conviction. We will lead knowing that God is our partner who will not leave us but who walks by our side and is forever present in all we do to bring healing to the sick and relief to the captive. Hear our commitment and move us to action in the name and with the courage and compassion of Jesus Christ.

Hymn *Lord, you give the Great Commission* #584 United Methodist Hymnal

Closing Prayer:

“So in the end love comes down to this...not some Clark Gable appraisal of Vivien Leigh or some sex symbol's seductive pose, but 'Help me sit up.' In the end love is not a smoldering glance across the dance floor, the click of crystal, a leisurely picnic spread upon summer's clover. It is the squeeze of a hand. I'm here. I'll be here no matter how long the struggle. Water? You need water? Here...Drink...Let me straighten your pillow” (On Love by Dr. Donald Messer, Chair UMC Global AIDS Fund Committee Coordinator)

Almighty God, you created us in your own image. Grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil, and to make no peace with oppression. And, that we may reverently use our freedom, help us to employ it in the maintenance of justice to the glory of your holy name; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen. (The Book of Common Prayer, USA, 20th cent., alt.)



Here are some ways you can make a difference!

- Find out what's happening in your local community regarding AIDS education or support services for persons living with AIDS.
- Volunteer in a local AIDS project in your community.
- Organize an educational event on HIV/AIDS in your church.
- Promote and participate in World AIDS Day – December 1st – go to www.umc-gbcs.org or www.gb-gm-umc.org for resources.
- Ask your annual conference to organize an AIDS support group or task force if it doesn't already have one.
- Talk with your friends about the pandemic.
- Financially support the United Methodist Global AIDS Fund, Advance Special #982345. This Fund provides funding for AIDS projects around the globe. To contribute, go to www.umglobalaidsfund.org or write a check to your local church with the Advance Special number on it.
- Pray for those who suffer with AIDS and their caretakers.

Resources and Links

- United Methodist Global AIDS Fund, www.umcorhealth.org
- World AIDS Day Campaign, www.worldaidsdaycampaign.org
- UNAIDS, www.unaids.org
- General Board of Church & Society, www.umc-gbcs.org
- General Board of Global Ministries, www.gb-gm-umc.org