

Worship Service for World AIDS Day 2012: *Towards the “three zeros” in faith, commitment and love*

Introduction

There has been a lot of progress in the response to HIV since AIDS was identified some three decades ago. Global infection rates have begun to decline, fewer babies are being born with HIV and 8 million people in low- and middle-income countries are now on life-saving anti-retroviral medicines.

However, much more remains to be done. The number of people newly infected is still higher than the number of people starting on treatment. And there remain 7 million people who need treatment but who do not have access to it, including 2 million children.¹

In addition, people living with or vulnerable to HIV continue to face stigma, discrimination and violations of their human rights and dignity, which thwart prevention and treatment efforts and deny them access to comprehensive care and support.

We are at a critical moment in the response to HIV. Progress has been made but it is not enough. Indeed, the only acceptable statistics here are “Zero AIDS-related deaths, Zero new HIV infections and Zero discrimination”. Therefore, this World AIDS Day, we not only come together to give thanks for what has been achieved but to commit ourselves anew to doing all we can to make the UNAIDS vision of the “three zeros” a reality.²

Preparing for the Service

You are encouraged to use this order of worship on or close to World AIDS Day - 1 December 2012. Make a priority of including people living with HIV in the planning and leading of your worship service.

Special items needed for this service include an internet connection, a video projector/screen and speakers. You will also need to provide each congregant with several colourful strips of paper (ideally strips in various colours of the rainbow) and a pen/pencil as they arrive (or you can place these on their chairs ahead of time).

The service can be downloaded from <http://www.e-alliance.ch/en/s/hiv aids/world-aids-day/>. It is also available in French, Spanish and German, along with other resources for World AIDS Day. Please feel free to adapt the service to your own local context.

¹ These statistics are taken from the UNAIDS report ‘Together we will end AIDS’ published in July 2012: http://www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/epidemiology/2012/20120718_togetherwewillendaids_en.pdf.

² UNAIDS is the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS. Its ‘three zeros’ vision is part of its 2012-2016 strategy: http://www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/unaidspublication/2010/JC2034_UNAIDS_Strategy_en.pdf.

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Preparatory Music

Words of Welcome

Welcome to our World AIDS Day service.

Much has been achieved in the past 30 years of the AIDS pandemic but if we are to see a day of "Zero AIDS-related deaths, Zero new HIV infections and Zero discrimination", we must work together to ensure that political will and financial commitments continue.

What's more, we, as faith communities, must strengthen and expand our work and partnerships to ensure that we too are playing a leading role in the HIV response.

Call to Worship

Leader: Therefore, we gather before our God of promises with faith, commitment and hope. Hear the promise of the one seated on the throne:

All: "See, I am making all things new."

Leader: Hear the promise of the resurrected one:

All: "I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Leader: Hear the promise borne on the wind:

All: "The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ."

Leader: We come to worship a faithful God, who keeps these promises of love. In the name of the Blessed Trinity, one God, now and forever, Amen.

Song *Cantai ao Senhor/Oh sing to the Lord (The International Ecumenical Hymnbook, Thuma Mina #3)*

Other suggestions include; Joyful, joyful we adore thee (Text: Henry Van Dyke; Tune: Hymn to Joy); Laudate omnes gentes (Taizé, Thuma Mina #134);

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Reading: Jeremiah 31: 10-14

Hear the word of the LORD, O nations,
and declare it in the coastlands far away;
say, 'He who scattered Israel will gather him,
and will keep him as a shepherd a flock.'
For the LORD has ransomed Jacob,
and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.

They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,
and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD,
over the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and over the young of the flock and the herd;
their life shall become like a watered garden,
and they shall never languish again.

Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,
and the young men and the old shall be merry.
I will turn their mourning into joy,
I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.
I will give the priests their fill of fatness,
and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty,
says the LORD.

Congregational Response

All: What will it take, O God...

Left: for us to see a day of no more AIDS-related deaths, no more new HIV infections and no more discrimination in the land of the living?

All: What will it take, O God...

Right: for change to come in our community, in our lives?

All: What will it take, O God...

Left: for the scattered to be gathered that all may praise and dance together?

All: What will it take, O God...

Right: for us to see the end of AIDS?

All: What will it take, O God...

Left: for us, your church, to be free from ignorance and fear?

All: What will it take, O God...

Right: for us to recognize your Word become flesh and living among us with HIV?

All: What will it take, O God, for the dance to begin and the deaths to end?

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Video³

This video provides reflections from people of faith who attended the International AIDS Conference held in Washington DC in July this year. In particular it challenges us as faith communities to do more to address HIV and points to key contributions that we can make as part of the global movement working to achieve the “three zeros”.

Reading: Revelation 21: 1-7

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying:

‘See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.’

And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ Then he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.’

Silent Reflection⁴

Sit in silent meditation, consider the following questions, and write any words or phrases of promise that come to mind on strips of paper given to you as you arrived:

- What comes to mind as you contemplate the new heaven and new earth?
- What promise does God have for you?
- What is God’s promise for your neighbour?
- What is God’s promise for the world?
- What is God’s promise in relation to HIV and AIDS?
- What is being made new?
- What peace do you notice within you?
- As you breathe, allow your breath to reach this place of peace.
- Breathe out the old, breathe in the new.
- Give thanks to God for this time of reflection.

³ The video is available at www.e-alliance.ch. See Annex for a direct link, a transcription and more details.

⁴ Alternatively, you could ask someone, perhaps someone living with HIV, to prepare a spoken reflection on these questions, and then invite people to write their own thoughts and ideas on their strips of paper in response.

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Declaration of Commitment

Leader: Church, we are the Body of Christ
All: *The Body of Christ, living with HIV*

Leader: If we choose, we can make a difference
All: *If we choose, we can help bring newness, hope and peace*

Leader: In our homes, in our church, in our community, in our nation, in our world
All: *In our bodies, in our minds, in our spirits*

Leader: Our sisters and brothers, our parents and children are infected with HIV
All: *We are living and dying with AIDS*

Leader: If we choose, the blockages to healing can be removed
All: *We choose compassion. We choose to respond*

Leader: Will you respond with your money, with your time, with your love?
All: *We are the Body of Christ. We choose to respond until the day of the "last one":*

-the day of the last new HIV infection and the last child born with HIV;

-the day of the last time that someone is stigmatized or bullied because of HIV and AIDS;

-the day of the last time that someone dies from this disease.

We pray and act for the day of the last one!

Intercessions

God of Hope
All of us are affected by HIV and AIDS.
At this time of Advent Hope,
As we prepare for the coming of your Son into this world
We give thanks for signs of hope.
For growing understanding
For medical advances
For changing attitudes and behaviour
For greater awareness and concern in your church.

All: Lord hear us, Lord Graciously hear us

God of Unity
Bind us together with strong ties of love
That all churches will be places where everyone can find acceptance,
May our churches provide a welcome for all affected by HIV and AIDS.
May they be places where care is given and received,
Especially for affected children and youth,

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Where stories are told and heard,
Where fear is overcome by love,
Where you are to be found.

All: Lord hear us, Lord Graciously hear us

God of Promise
The end of AIDS is in sight!
Give us courage to run the race set before us.
We look to you in prayer and in action
For a day when all will have access to education and information
For a day when all who need it can get affordable and good quality treatment
For a day when all are accepted, included and given care and support
Let us shed our cynicism, denial, selfishness and laziness.
May we surprise you, as you surprise us!

All: Lord hear us, Lord Graciously hear us

Song *Yarabbassalami (Agape Songs of Hope and Reconciliation #110);*

Other song suggestions include: O God, who gives us life (Text: Carl Daw); God of our life (Text: Hugh Kerr); Word of justice (Agape #107); Thuma Mina (Agape # 91); Enviado soy de Dios/Sent by the Lord am I (Iona Community, "Sent by the Lord", p.18); Senzenina (Iona Community, "Sent by the Lord", p.46)

Sending Forth

All congregants stand and hold aloft the strips of paper used in the silent reflection.

Leader: In Genesis 9, God said to Noah ...'I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth... I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.'

All: We claim the promise of our God for all, in our hearts, minds and actions.

Leader: Then go forth, confident in the trustworthiness of the One who placed the rainbow in the heavens - that we may see, remember and do.

All: We claim the promise of our God for all, in our hearts, minds and actions.

Leader: Go forth, strengthened by hope from the One who sent Jesus the Christ, knowing that this hope will not disappoint us.

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All: We claim the promise of our God for all, in our hearts, minds and actions.

Leader: Go forth by faith. The One who placed the rainbow and sent the Christ has sent the Spirit, so we know that God is with us always.

Recessional Music

Credits: This liturgy was written and compiled by Ruth Foley, with input from Andrew Donaldson, Karen Plater and Sara Speicher, unless otherwise indicated.

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The Call to Worship is based on a prayer developed for the Interfaith Pre-Conference to AIDS 2006 by the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance.

The texts for the Congregational Response, the Declaration of Commitment and the Sending Forth are all adapted from resources produced by the Balm in Gilead for the National Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS: <http://www.nationalweekofprayerforthehealingofaids.org/downloads/2012%20NWPFA%20E-Worship%20Book%20Final-fnl.pdf>.

The final response in the Declaration of Commitment draws from the Prayer of Commitment written for an Interfaith Service of Hope and Commitment held at the time of the NAMES Project AIDS Quilt Memorial display in Washington National Cathedral in July 2012.

The intercessions are adapted from prayers prepared by The Diakonia Council of Churches in South Africa.

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Annex: Video- Reflections from people of faith attending the International AIDS Conference held in Washington DC in July 2012.

The video is available online at <http://iac.ecumenicaladvocacy.org/in-the-rush-for-a-cure-lessons-we-cannot-forget>, or can be downloaded as a standalone file from <http://www.e-alliance.ch/en/s/hiv aids/world-aids-day/>.

If you are unable to show a video in your place of worship, you could read some of the main points made by people in the video that have been transcribed below.

Video Transcription

Peter Prove, Executive Director, Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance

There is a lot of excitement here at the International AIDS Conference 2012 about new science and new developments that might hold out promise for a vaccine or a cure. But, as much as we must celebrate and pursue these opportunities, we must not lose sight of the 'software' of the HIV response - the crucial enablers, the community based programming - that enables communities to engage in the response and deal with issues like stigma and discrimination that are obstacles to any delivery of that sort of scientific advance. We will not win this struggle against HIV with pharmaceuticals alone. It has to be dealt with at the community level, at the level of attitudes and at the level of empowerment of those communities most affected. And in that regard the faith-based community has a key responsibility and a key potential.

Rev Michael Schuenemeyer, Executive Director, United Church of Christ HIV and AIDS Network

One of the things that the faith-community has learned is that we work better when we work together; that the networking of relationships across all sectors of the response is really critical to being effective in responding to this disease.

Erlinda Senturias, Former Consultant, Christian Conference of Asia

If we want to turn the tide, everybody must be invited to the table, everyone must be included. We cannot exclude anyone.

Faghmeda Miller, Positive Muslims, South Africa

Although some of us are working together, not all of us are working together. This is the biggest problem. Some communities still have this notion that 'it's not affecting us'. It's always "out there". It's in your religion, not in my religion. We really must work hard to change this and work together 100%.

Canon Gideon Byamugisha, Goodwill Ambassador on HIV & AIDS, Christian Aid UK

Communities still need to learn that having the right language is the first step. This means having the right language to reduce stigma and shame, to multiply safe practises and access to testing, treatment and empowerment.

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Pernessa Seele, CEO and Founder, The Balm in Gilead

Today, the AIDS epidemic is teaching us about the commonalities between the African Americans and Africans. Today in Raleigh Durham, North Carolina, the rate of HIV among black women is now higher than the rate of HIV among women in the Republic of the Congo. So, we are learning about the commonalities among black women, men who have sex with men – and the phobias around that - and youth. We have so many commonalities. One commonality that is central is the role of faith. For black people worldwide, faith is central to how they address everything in their lives.

Asavari Herwadkar, Coordinator for the Asian Interfaith Network on HIV/AIDS (AINA) and the International Network of Religious Leaders living with or Personally Affected by HIV and AIDS (INERELA+) in Asia Pacific

Communities have realised that they have to help much more than they have been up to now; that when it comes to health issues that include elements of stigma and discrimination; it cannot be left solely to a few people, to the health professionals or politicians. The impact that they could have as faith communities means that they have to play a bigger role if we really want to properly address these issues.

Rev Michael Schuenemeyer, Executive Director, United Church of Christ HIV and AIDS Network

So often we are quick to jump to judgemental positions about how HIV is transmitted, and we forget that we really need to ground ourselves in the value that as a child of God every person is endowed with worth and dignity that human judgement cannot set aside. And we always need to be engaging in our response to HIV or any other issue from the values of worth and dignity.

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