

Planning Services of Worship that Lift Up World AIDS Day

Worship is central to the Reformed tradition. Engage your congregation in the issues related to HIV and AIDS through the prayer of confession/assurance of pardon, the lighting of the Advent candle, the children's moment, the sermon, a minute for mission (see the entry for December 1, World AIDS Day, in the 2010 *Mission Yearbook for Prayer & Study* at www.pcusa.org/missionyearbook), the prayers of the people and a work of art or a bulletin insert. Here are some descriptions and examples.

Bulletin Inserts

If you are exploring an area of darkness each Sunday, try creating bulletin inserts that are both educational and inspiring. For each Sunday, include in the insert some statistics and news stories that illuminate the prevalence and depth of the "darkness" you are highlighting (HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, and so forth.) and its relevance to your community or global mission partners. Balance the section on "Naming the Darkness..." with one entitled, "Signs of Light..." which highlights efforts at addressing that issue and statistics that reveal some progress that is being made, again making every effort to choose statistics and stories that are particularly relevant to your congregation.

Create your own, using the most recent statistics for your own community and global mission partners. Remember, the more relevant the information is to your particular congregation and ministry context, the more meaningful it will be. The Centers for Disease Control website at www.cdc.gov/hiv/ contains a wealth of information.

Art/Visual Displays

Visual Images and Banners: One very effective way to engage people in HIV/AIDS awareness is to use a visual symbol, such as the AIDS Ribbon or a panel of the AIDS Memorial Quilt (www.aidsquilt.org). If you are exploring a different area of darkness each week, it can be powerful to have some kind of banner that represents that darkness and the hope, peace, joy, and love that Christ brings to it. Order HIV and AIDS pins from International Peacemaking, <http://gamc.pcusa.org/ministries/international-aids>

Slide Show: If your congregation is technologically savvy, you could create a slide show that offers relevant visual images to "enflesh" what might otherwise be some pretty abstract ideas.

Bulletin Covers: Design a different bulletin cover image each week that pertains to that week's theme, or create one design for the whole season that incorporates all four themes.

Bulletin Boards and Displays: If your congregation has a bulletin board or other display areas, change those each week to reflect the themes. Display information, books, objects or brochures that might be of interest to your congregation. Order a poster *AIDS: "It's a Matter of Faith"* from www.pcusa.org/aids. Play to your congregation's strengths and interests. If you have art students, professional artists or graphic designers, art teachers or other people with experience relating to the topic at hand, seek them out and get their help!



The pastor of Eastridge Uniting Church standing in front of his congregation's HIV/AIDS information table on the First Sunday of Advent in Mitchells Plain, South Africa in 2003. Photo by Emily Rose Proctor

An example of what one church did to incorporate Advent themes and World AIDS Day

During the 2009 season of Advent, Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church of Baltimore, Maryland, incorporated the idea of focusing on an aspect of darkness each Sunday. Each week during the silence between the prelude and the call to worship, someone marched in carrying a paper banner representing that week's "darkness". The banner hung vertically from a pole that was placed in a stand (you might find some other way to hang the banner that suits your congregation's space and props).

During the congregational response to the Assurance of Pardon, the liturgist pulled from behind the banner a sign. On the sign was printed that Sunday's theme (hope, peace, joy, love) in big bold letters. The sign was suspended by string in front of the phrases expressing the week's "darkness." At the end of the fourth Sunday in Advent, all four banners were hanging in the sanctuary with the corresponding signs with the themes of Advent.

If your congregation already has banners with some kind of positive graphics or images that correspond with the four themes of Advent, or if the congregation or worship leader wants to create some, the paper banners of darkness can be placed over those banners and ripped down at an appropriate point in the Christmas Eve service (such as when the Christ candle is lit or after the last reading ends). The "Hope," "Peace," "Joy," and "Love" signs can then be re-attached above the underlying banner (if appropriate). This helps provide a sense of unity and a culminating experience for your congregation's worship during Advent. This idea of having some sort of visual representation can be as elaborate or as simple as suits your congregation.

- Written by the Rev. Emily Rose Proctor, associate pastor, Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church, and co-moderator of the Presbyterian AIDS Network, a Network of the Presbyterian Health, Education & Welfare Association (PHEWA).