

## Themes of Advent and HIV and AIDS

The traditional themes of the Sundays of Advent are hope, peace, joy and love. Many congregations light a candle each week and focus part of the liturgy on the concept for that week. Each of these words has unique meaning in a world where an estimated 33 million people are living with HIV or AIDS and an estimated 2.7 million more people are being infected with HIV annually.<sup>1</sup> Since World AIDS Day usually falls between the first and second Sundays in Advent, we will focus on the themes of hope and peace. If you are incorporating these themes into your preaching and/or your liturgy, consider asking yourself, at least on a Sunday close to December 1, how that theme relates to HIV and AIDS. Below are some reflections to get you started.

### Hope

What does hope look like in an HIV+ world? What does hope look like for those in your community most affected by HIV and AIDS? For your mission partners? For those in your own congregation who have been affected but have never been asked to share their stories or who are at risk for infection and don't know it? Maybe it looks like:

#### Educating and Increasing Awareness

- Educate all people, regardless of gender, age, race, or nationality on the causes, symptoms, treatment, and prevention of HIV, as well as educating them about the hope after diagnosis, and the hope that undergirds preventative measures
- Ask questions about HIV and AIDS in the places where your congregation already does mission work, locally and globally.
- Observe World AIDS Day with other people of faith in your community.
- Commemorate World AIDS Day at your Sunday morning service of worship.

#### Advocating

- Advocate for increased access to life saving antiretroviral drugs.
- Support targeted prevention efforts leading to changes in sexual behavior and a drop in new HIV infections in Rwanda and Zimbabwe in 2008.<sup>2</sup>

#### Nurturing Acceptance

- Create a "safe place" for persons who are HIV+ by asking your own congregation to share their stories about how HIV and AIDS have touched their lives.
- Invite someone who is HIV+ to share their story with you and your congregation.

#### Taking Action

- Pray for all those affected and effected by HIV and AIDS.
- Learn more about what churches are doing to respond to the pandemic by viewing a video, *I Am the Changing Face of HIV/AIDS*. View segments online at [www.pcusa.org/pan](http://www.pcusa.org/pan); or order from the Church Store, [www.pcusa.org/store](http://www.pcusa.org/store) or by calling (800) 524-2612 (PDS# 24-354-10-05).
- Contribute to the HIV and AIDS and Peacemaking Offering Extra Commitment Opportunity, #E053504 to support the PC(USA) as it works with partner churches to address both the causes

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<sup>1</sup> UNAIDS Report on Global AIDS Epidemic 2008

<sup>2</sup>Sophie Barton-Knott and Jonathan Rich (UNAIDS), "Press Release: Substantial increases in HIV prevention efforts producing results, but not enough to turn back the epidemic," *2008 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic*; [http://data.unaids.org/pub/GlobalReport/2008/080725\\_GR08\\_pressrelease\\_en.pdf](http://data.unaids.org/pub/GlobalReport/2008/080725_GR08_pressrelease_en.pdf).

and impact of HIV and AIDS by empowering women, reducing poverty through income-generating activities and providing orphan care and support, home-based care and AIDS education in seminaries.

- Order a bulletin insert that lifts up the partnership with the Peacemaking Program in the fight against AIDS. Go to [www.pcusa.org/ministries/specialofferings/2010-peacemaking-offering-order-form](http://www.pcusa.org/ministries/specialofferings/2010-peacemaking-offering-order-form).
- Take steps to eradicate the poverty that fuels this virus.
- Get tested and encourage your congregation members to “know their status.”

## Peace

What does the prevention and treatment of HIV and AIDS have to do with peace? A lot, both on a personal level and on a global level.

- How does a person who is HIV + have peace, when there is no universal access to good health care, adequate food, clean water, affordable housing, and antiretroviral medication?
- How does a person who is HIV+ have peace when there is still so much stigma associated with being HIV+ that many people are reluctant to even be tested?
- How do we stop the spread of HIV, when nations at war experience higher rates of rape and poverty, both of which are linked to increased rates of HIV?
- How can nations experience stability when a large portion of their workforce has died or is dying of AIDS or when a whole generation of children are growing up without parents?
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*“AIDS not only presents the most serious health crisis of our time but also destroys families, social groups and national institutions. It hampers economic growth and incapacitates local police, military and international peacekeeping forces that uphold security around the world.”<sup>3</sup>*

## Naming the Darkness, and Looking for Signs of Light and Change

Darkness and light are themes often woven into the liturgy throughout the Advent season. One way to tie all the Advent services together, while also integrating HIV and AIDS awareness into one service, is to highlight an area of darkness in your community or in the larger world each Sunday during Advent. Darkness and light could also be linked to the themes of hope, peace, joy, and love.

- **First Sunday of Advent:** Focus on the Global HIV and AIDS pandemic and talk about hope-- the hope of effective long-term treatment for those diagnosed with the virus and the hope of raising awareness about prevention.
- **Second Sunday of Advent:** Focus on international wars and conflicts or gun violence, and talk about the promise and search for a just peace.
- **Third Sunday of Advent:** Explore the abuses of creation or the problems of world hunger, and talk about the joy that would be possible if creation could sing its praise to God unhindered by pollution, the overconsumption of our natural resources and excessive waste, or if its people did not suffer from hunger.
- **Fourth Sunday of Advent:** Highlight issues of domestic violence or prejudice, and talk about the model of love that we have in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>3</sup> Genevieve Tremblay and Ziad Haider, “A Word from the Co-Directors,” *HIV/AIDS as a Threat to Global Security: Conference Proceedings* (International Conflict Research Group, Yale University, 2002), [http://www.yale.edu/icrg/ICRG\\_2002\\_POST-CONF\\_PROCEEDINGS\\_WO\\_SLEWIS.pdf](http://www.yale.edu/icrg/ICRG_2002_POST-CONF_PROCEEDINGS_WO_SLEWIS.pdf), p. 1.