

AIDS SUNDAY 2004

"Women and AIDS: Women, Great is your Faith"

A LITURGY TO BE USED BY ITSELF OR INCORPORATED
INTO THE EURCHARIST.

Jointly produced by
Christian Conference of Asia
Hong Kong Christian Council
St. John's Cathedral HIV Education Centre

WORLD AIDS SUNDAY

***“Women and HIV/AIDS:
Woman, great is your faith”***

The World Health Organization declared the first World AIDS Day in 1988. The day, 1 December, quickly became established as one of the world's most successful commemorative days and is now recognized and celebrated by a diverse range of constituents every year around the globe.

Then, in 1997, recognizing the need for year-round campaign activity for HIV and AIDS, UNAIDS launched the first year-long World AIDS Campaign.

In June 2001, the United Nations General Assembly held a Special Session on HIV/AIDS where governments agreed to a set of targets and goals to fight AIDS in a Declaration of Commitment. Following the session, UN agencies and governments started to organize themselves around the promises outlined in the Declaration. Now, civil society is also seeking to ensure its campaigning and advocacy efforts are similarly coordinated through a strengthened World AIDS Campaign.

The year 2004 sees the Campaign entering an exciting transition phase. The theme for World AIDS Day 2004 focuses on ***“Women, Girls, HIV and AIDS”***. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection and to the impact of AIDS. Around half of all people living with HIV in the world are female. The rate of HIV infection among young people worldwide is growing rapidly – 67% of newly infected individuals in the developing world are young people aged between 15 and 24 years. The escalating risk is especially evident among young women and girls (15-24 years), who make up 64% of the young people in developing countries living with HIV/AIDS.

The World AIDS Campaign accelerates the global response to HIV and AIDS through a focus on women and girls – preventing new infections, promoting equal access to treatment and mitigating the impact of AIDS.

We hope you will use these resources as a tool for education in worship bringing Light, Hope and Justice into the world. Please feel free to adapt the liturgy for your own setting

and choosing your own music and hymns.

WORLD AIDS DAY LITURGY

A moment of silence with reflective music

A Welcome

Leader: Today we join people all over the world as we come to remember those who have died and those who are suffering through HIV/AIDS. Today we also remember those who are working to stop the AID pandemic; those who are carers; those who mourn and those who are working to against stigma and discrimination.

This year, the theme for World AIDS Day is ***“Women, Girls, HIV and AIDS”***. Women and girls represent an increasing proportion of those infected with HIV and in some regions, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, women account for more than 50% of those infected. At the same time, women and girls are particularly affected by the social and economic consequences of the AIDS epidemic, and have taken on a major share of the burden of HIV and AIDS-related care.

We lend this theme to our liturgy with the biblical theme: ***Women, Great Is Your Faith.***

THE GREETING

Leader: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

All: **And also with you.**

Leader: May the God who calls us to unity and the fullness of life and love unite you all.

All: **Amen**

THE GATHERING PRAYER

Leader: God who comes alongside and lives within, we thank you for the privilege of being together at this time and in this place.

All: **We thank you.**

Leader: We pray that your love will unite us into a community of grace and discovery. Please cleanse from us anything that would sap our strength for togetherness. Free us from negative imaginations and the barriers that sometimes keep us apart. In this time refresh in us the dream of a better world and put before us new possibilities for service.

All: **Lord, hear us.**

Leader: Renew in us your compassion so that we may be a people with loving purposes. We come together to be your alleluia in a troubled world.

All: **Amen.**

HYMN:

A READING FROM THE GOSPEL

Hear the Gospels of our Lord Jesus Christ:

John Chapter 8 Verses 1-11

Mark Chapter 5 verses 21-34

RESPONSE TO THE WORD

Women are often denied access. For whatever reasons, they are often left without voice, without resources, without power. But sometimes their cries are heard and they effect change. A Cannanite woman changed Jesus, even when his disciples were urging him to send her away. It is the only story in the Gospels in which Jesus changes his mind. But now it is Jesus, the Christ, who brings the Gospel to us, both women and men, and to our world. It is Jesus, the Christ, who calls us to change.

(A song or reflective music)

SERMON: **“Throwing of the First Stone!”**

Throwing of the First Stone

John 7:53-8:11

By Dr. WONG Wai Ching Angela

When I'm asked to write this biblical reflection on the question of AIDS, I immediately recalled a picture I saw on newspaper. It was a picture of a long queue of woman, lining up in front of the village council, waiting for the distribution of AIDS vaccine. The footage for the picture was an interview of a man who took the vaccine for some weeks

and reported strong bodily reaction including heavy vomiting and swelling of limbs. The picture was striking to me not only because of the long queue but the shyly smiling faces of the women, dressing in colored country outfit, with one's head staying close to the back of the other, the one at the back embracing and holding tightly onto the one in front, forming a line of warm and closely knitted faces and bodies, standing in big contrast to the pale, cold, and boring gray walls of the village council house. Most of these women contracted the disease because members of their families or they themselves were enticed to trade blood for money for economic survival. The picture caught my eyes with not grievances, not hatred nor miseries, but innocent faces, warmth of a community, and of course, negligence due to poverty on their part and corruption on the part of the local officials.

One of the main obstacles in the campaign against AIDS transmission has been its sexual connotations. Despite the widely circulated information of AIDS being not an infectious disease, many still believe that AIDS-patients are social and physical “untouchables,” or that AIDS is a direct result of immoral sex including lasciviousness and homosexuality and therefore religiously something of divine punishment. The case of the villages in Huinan province of China makes a strong case for the otherwise. The question of AIDS is not only a result of the lascivious urban life but also a political question of who controls and determines the sale of vaccine; it is an economic question of who gets stuck with the terrifying consequence of transmission among family members and across generations; it is a cultural question of who gets to hear what the disease is about and how the AIDS-patients, whoever they are, reach out for medical treatment and community care and support; and it is very much a religious question due to the many prejudices against non-reproductive, extra-marital sexuality found in the ancient biblical texts. Today, we shall take a look at the controversial passage of **“The Woman Taken in Adultery” at John 7:53-8:11** and reflect on Jesus teachings on understanding human judgment and sin.

Indeed, the question of sin dominates most of our theological thinking and church teachings. It is usually the first didactic class for any churchgoer. And it is often seen as the single most important message in any evangelical meeting and the fundamental doctrine for Christian conversion. So much so that the Catholic Church has instituted confession as a regular practice of all the faithful; and the Protestant Christians would seek the consolation of their pastors at every service. Given the historical background of the Bible, sin equals to unfaithful, unholy and does not deserve any respect. Among the many kinds of sin listed, non-marital and non-reproductive sexual activities have been the most controversial and hotly debated in the contemporary society. Issues of homosexuality, cohabitation, divorce, premarital and extra-marital sexuality, etc. often generate heated confrontation and division among different Christian confession and within denominations. Most unfortunately, many who prefer reproductive, marital, and therefore status quo sexuality would spend time in classifying “right” and “wrong” sexuality rather than looking into the nature of sin and understanding it in the present context. The story of John 7:53-8:11 is a good reminder to our often presumptions of who should be the judge of others’ sin and what should be our attitude to the alleged sinners of our society.

The story traditionally known as “the Woman Taken in Adultery” has a complicated textual history. The passage is missing from the earliest Greek manuscripts of John. When the passage is found in manuscripts, it appears in several locations including

after 7:36, 7:52, and the end. Although scholars agreed that this passage should be an authentic piece of teaching of Jesus, opinions are divided on whether or not the story belonged originally to the tradition of the Gospel of John. This situation is unique – a well-known Jesus story that is told and retold in the life of the church, but whose textual and canonical status is highly debatable. This makes it difficult for the interpreter to fit the passage or message into the larger scheme of John. In some ways, then, John 7:53-8:11 is a story without a time or place, a story to be read on its own terms (O’Day 1992: 297). How did Jesus set the scribes, the Pharisees and the woman free in its miraculous turning around of a supposed trap set up for him?

The first question raised by the story in us is who should be the ones who judge others’ sin. Popular interpretation reads this story as a judgment against the woman. The woman is apparently the embodiment of sin. She is an adulteress, caught during the abhorring act, deserved of deadly punishment, and proposed to be stoned to death. The story is usually read also as a manifestation of Jesus’ graciousness, his embodiment of mercy and forgiveness, even a lowly, non-disputable (caught at the adultery bed), sinful woman of the most serious sexual offense shall be loved and pardoned. In Augustine’s commentary on the story in *Homily 33*, he set up a polarity with the woman as a sinful wretch and Jesus as the example of mercy under the heading of “sin meets mercy.” Despite his intention to highlight Jesus’ forgiveness his reading dehumanizes and objectifies the woman as much as the scribes and Pharisees did of her in vv. 3-5. While the latter uses the woman as a part of their scheme to trap Jesus, the former uses the woman as a plot to set up the salvation power of Christ.

But what both Augustine and the scribes and Pharisees missed is that Jesus treats an apparently “sinful” woman the same way as he treats those who are supposed to be morally “clean and superior.” In the story, a woman “caught in the very act of committing adultery” (8:4) is brought to Jesus by scribes and Pharisees to “test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him” (8:6). Their interests were clearly not in law or justice since they didn’t produce the man who must also be there for the act of adultery. They have already tried and sentenced the woman on their own terms since there had been no mentioning of stoning even in Leviticus or Deuteronomy where death penalty for adultery was prescribed. They press their case only in the hope to entrap Jesus. But Jesus responded with his famous saying of “let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” which put both the accusers and the accused on the same par (v. 7) (Thurston 1998, 86). The original set up of a polarity between the morally behaved and the sinners is completely abolished. When the original accusers “went away, one by one, beginning with the elders,” the table is turned and resulted in having at both ends of throwing and being thrown only sinners. There are no more questions of who is morally clean and superior and who sins.

The first question raised by the passage is who is to judge who is a sinner. Is the alleged adulteress a sinner? Why are those who are invited to throw the first stone if they are without sin eventually left without exception? Are we not all sinners? And is there any difference between “our sins” and the “woman’s sin”? According to Thurston, the central scene of the story is Jesus’ challenge to the religious establishment and the status quo. By making his famous invitation to “throw the first stone” he shifts the balance of power in favor of the accused. In fact, having put the accusers and the accused on the same par Jesus extends his invitation to both to give up an old way of life for a new way (1998, 86). Whereas the old way polarizes people in the categories of

morally right or wrong, the new way requests a deep reflection on the nature of sin, that at the end of the day, we are all imperfect beings offending God and others in our different ways. The importance of the story is not about “the woman’s sin” and Jesus’ graciousness but our sin and the way to love and accept others as one of us.

To accept others as one among us means to address the others directly with respect. One of the unexpected outcome of the trap was the bringing forth of an accused to Jesus. Upon the pressed request to judge the sin of the woman, Jesus bends down to write on the ground with his fingers; he remains silent there until he stands up twice to address the crowd and then the woman. What Jesus wrote on the ground with his fingers remained a biblical mystery but what he said to the crowd and especially to the woman was loud and clear. Each time he speaks, he straightens up and addresses his audience directly. The crowd departs one by one according to the different answer they must have given in response to the question of Jesus; the woman is set free to start a new life after her experience of “not one condemning her” including Jesus. The power of setting free must be strong for both the crowd and the woman for either one will be locked into a destructive relationship with another if not because of Jesus’ intervention. The scribes and Pharisees would continue to hurt the woman or even kill her for their secret revenge on Jesus’ undermining of their power and influence. The woman would have to live with the grievances and injustice done to her even if she would survive the ordeal. Jesus’ call for an equal reflection in the supposedly morally right and the accused allow the community to rebuild itself and to respect the integrity of one another.

It is generally agreed that the Gospel of John is very different from the other Synoptic Gospels. That might explain why the story is always attached to the Gospel despite its dubious textual history. Sandra Schneiders finds four characteristics in the women of the gospel: first, woman in John is shown as genuinely faithful disciples; second, the women characters in John are highly individuated and women’s religious experience is depicted as nuanced; third, they play unconventional roles, e.g. the Samaritan woman; and fourth, they are noted for their individual initiative and decisive action. In general, Schneiders finds no “women’s roles” in John that are different from those of the men around Jesus (Thurston 1998, 80). The story of “the adulteress,” despite its apparent insertion into the Gospel, shares the same theme with the other Johannine stories of women that no one shall be treated as subhuman and everyone, regardless of their race, gender, class and health, should be addressed as one of God’s sons and daughters, partaking of the divine images, deserved of the greatest respect and care.

Because of her being specially “chosen” by Jesus’ enemies in an attempt to dishonor him, Ross Saunders classifies the alleged adulteress as one among the “specially chosen” women of God (Saunders 1996, 83). “Let the one who has never broken a law throw the first stone.” With careful examination of us, no one should ever take up the first stone. Not even did Jesus.

Reference:

- O’Day, Gail R. 1992. “John.” *In The Women’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe; 293-304. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox.
- Saunders, Ross. 1996. *Outrageous Women Outrageous God: Women in the First Two Generations of Christianity*. Alexandria, Australia: E. J. Dywer.
- Thurston, Bonnie. 1998. *Women in the New Testament: Questions and Commentary*. New York: Crossroad.

THE PRAYERS

Leader: God of compassion, we pray for your grace and comfort toward people in difficult conditions: for those lacking food, shelter and clothing; for the sick and all who are wasting away through disease, particularly those afflicted with HIV/AIDS. Lord, hear us.

All: **Lord hears our prayer.**

Leader: For those mistreated through injustice, intolerance and ignorance; for those who have lost their hope in life; for the lonely and depressed; for the worried and fearful. Lord, hear us.

All: **Lord hears our prayer.**

Leader: For those caught in wars and conflicts; for all circles of family and friendship broken by death, especially those represented here. May the strength of Jesus and the comfort of your Spirit be with those for whom we pray. Lord, hear us.

All: **Lord hears our prayer.**

Leader: God of mystery, we are blessed with so much. Grant us one more thing – grateful hearts. We give thanks for the lives of those we have lost, even though cut short. We offer thanks for friends along the way who brighten our lives and support us in times of trouble. We struggle with, but are grateful for, the rough and twisty bits of life as well as the smooth and straight ones. We thank you for the ability to let go, yet remember, and the human capacity to feel pain yet experience for the future. For all this and more we are thankful. Lord, hear us.

All: **Lord hears our prayer.**

Leader: We give you thanks for all who have generously given themselves in the service of others, for all whose abundant generosity of time – the listening ear, the shoulder upon which to lean – for the practical gifts willingly shared.

All: **We give you thanks, O God.**

TELLING OUR STORY

People tell their stories. One or more of the following stories are told.

Feeling of someone living with HIV

(Personal testimony from Thailand)

A 38 year old lady, who refused to identify herself to others but willing to open up to HIV related organizations, knew the result of her blood test almost 7 years ago. She said "I have to lie to myself everyday since the first day I found out that I don't have the HIV virus"

She is a Muslim with a 14-year-old daughter; her husband is from another province. She separated from her husband after he got involved with other women. She then took the burden of doing the house chores as well as taking care of her daughter and relatives from her husband's family.

"I was very angry with my husband after finding out that I contracted the disease from him. I was miserable when I knew that he has been getting involved with other women and had brought the disease to me. I left home with my daughter and came back to Chiang Mai" She refused to accept her situation until she became exhausted and sick. When the situation got more stressful then she had to seek help. She felt her life was in a chaos.

"I was sad that my best friend, someone I could rely on when I'm sick or the person who would take care of my daughter when I pass away, has told my story to other people. I was afraid of the consequences it will have on my business."

"I was mad and wanted to kill that person, but I cannot do that. If I did, who would take care of my daughter? How will she live?" But I found another solution.

In the end I have prove that my business can be a success. I have friends who support me especially the staff of the CCT AIDS Ministry for their counseling and encouragement. They told me to take rest when I'm tired, to take care of my health and do my job the best I could. The words of my neighbors and my clients gave me courage. So I found my answer.

"I have to live for my daughter. My daughter is my heart. She is still in her teenage years. I have to safe guard and protect her from all danger as long as I am still alive."

From the CCT AIDS Ministry, Thailand

Encounters with Life...

(Personal Testimony from India)

My name is Kamala from the state of Tamilnadu of India. "We were very poor. My father found it difficult to feed our family of four daughters and a sick wife. My mother died when I was fourteen years old and a friendly neighbor told me that she would take me to the city and get me work. She sold me to a brothel where there were many more girls like me!! We had to work very hard and when some of the girls were sick we had to do their work also! We were very tired and sick. We could keep only a part of the money we earned.

We were beaten up by the police quite frequently and also taken to jail. I was beaten up in jail

for speaking rudely to one of the policemen. After my jail sentence I was sent to a remand home.

I was sick all the time. There were others also who were not well. We were falling sick with diarrhea, skin infection or TB. One day they took our blood for some tests. Later they told us that we had AIDS. We were then kept away from the others. Everybody was afraid and unwilling to touch us. Nobody would visit us. The food would be kept in front of the room. Medicines were given to us and we were also sometimes taken to hospital for treatment. I met my husband at this hospital. He was also HIV positive. I married him and went to stay with him.

We have two children, one is very weak. I think she is positive. I have delivered my children at home because I knew that the hospitals would throw me out if they knew that I am HIV positive.

Now I work in a charitable hospital where they look after AIDS patients who are very sick. My husband also helps in looking after HIV infected people. ”

This pathetic story could be the story of any of the millions of young girls and women who are forced to become commercial sex-workers.

“Poverty has the face of a woman” Poor women are vulnerable to contracting HIV/AIDS. Illiteracy, Poverty, an inadequate public health system and political apathy towards this crisis, has resulted not only in India topping the world HIV figures, but has also pushed women in India to a pitiable state of stigma, denial and marginalization!!

Women involved in sex work, operate either from brothels, streets, markets, slums, highways, guesthouses, or sometimes in high-class hotels. They have no escape as they are at the mercy of the women who run the brothel, who have a number of men to see that they remain well behaved and remain within the institutions. They are also not in a position to ensure safe sex.

Although there cannot be a simple solution to resolve this web of poverty, it would help a lot, if men would be more responsible in the way they treat women. Women need economic and social independence and a better approach towards health issues.

*Contributed by Susan Jacob
Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, India*

HYMN:

Leader: *What is the Red Ribbon?
What does it mean to the World AIDS Day?*

Leader: The Red Ribbon is the international symbol of AIDS awareness; a symbol of respect for HIV positive people and people living with AIDS, and it reminds us all of the constant need to keep up the fight against AIDS.

It was created in early 1991 by Visual AIDS in New York for a global symbol in the fight against AIDS. A symbol for solidarity and tolerance with those often discriminated by the public – the people living with HIV and AIDS. In the style of the yellow ribbons, which were popular in the USA at the time as a symbol for awareness of those soldiers fighting in the gulf war, the “Red Ribbon” was born.

The Red Ribbon is ...

- **“Red”** like **love**, as a symbol of passion and tolerance towards those affected.
- **“Red”** like **blood**, representing the pain caused by the many people that died of AIDS.
- **“Red”** like the **anger** about the helplessness by which we are facing a disease for which there is still on chance for a cure.
- **“Red”** as a sign of **warning** not to carelessly ignore one of the biggest problems of our time.

Wearing the Red Ribbon is your first step in the fight against AIDS

(Music is played and red ribbons are distributed to the congregation. During the music, we ask you to take a red ribbon and pin it to the person next to you.)

A TIME FOR REMEMBRANCE AND THANKSGIVING

Leader: Let us pray. God our Father, we thank you that you have made each one of us in your own image and given us gifts and talents with which to serve you. We thank you for those who lives we have shared and whom we remember this night. We thank you for the good we have experienced in them and for the blessing they have been to us.

Give us faith to leave them in your care, confident in your promises, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

(Names may be remembered and read out or silence.)

THE LIGHTING OF CANDLES

All stand.

Leader: We live in much darkness. We are often uncertain. We are sometimes afraid.

All: **In the darkness, we light a candle of hope.**

(The first candle is being lighted.)

Leader: We all have sorrows. We have known pain. Each of us carries special regrets. In our palm, we light a candle of forgiveness.

(The second candle is being lighted.)

We are sometimes lonely, and the world seems cold and hard. In our loneliness, we light a candle of love.

(The third candle is being lighted.)

We have known awe, wonder, mystery and glimmerings of perfection in our imperfect world. In our wonder, we light a candle of praise.

(The fourth candle is being lighted.)

May our separate lights become one flame, that together we may be nourished by its glow.

(Source: An Interfaith Celebration of Love)

ALL SAY TOGETHER: THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in Heaven,
Hallowed be your Name,
Your Kingdom come,
Your will be done on earth as in Heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.

For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are Yours
now and forever. Amen.

OFFERTORY HYMN: *During the hymn, the offering is taken up.*

THE BLESSING AND DISMISSAL

Leader: Encircle us, O God. Keep love within, hatred out.
Encircle us, O God. Keep joy within, despair out.
Encircle us, O God. Keep peace within, disharmony out.
Encircle us, O God. Keep hopes within, discouragement out.

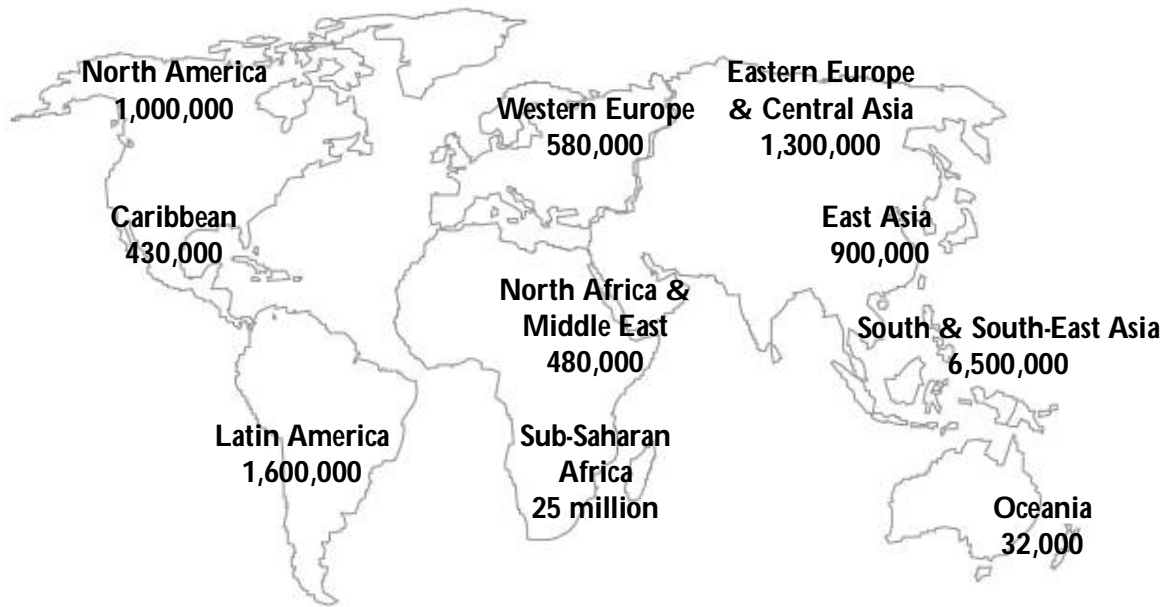
Your presence is in us. Your presence is around us. Your presence is love.
Your presence is in us. Your presence is around us. Your presence is joy.
Your presence is in us. Your presence is around us. Your presence is peace.
Your presence is in us. Your presence is around us. Your presence is hope.

Encircle us O God and may the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son,
and the Holy Spirit be with you now and always. Amen.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All: **In the name of Christ, Amen.**

Global estimates of HIV and AIDS as of end 2003



Total number of adults and children living with HIV: 38 million (35-42 million)

Transmission Modes

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is a disease caused by a virus called Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). The virus damages the body's defense system. The infected person gradually loses his/her defense against a variety of germs, which may eventually cause death.

HIV is transmitted:

- **Sexual Contact**
Through sexual activities (e.g. vaginal, anal or oral) without the use of condoms with someone who is already infected.

- **Mother To Child Transmission**
Transmission of HIV from an infected mother to her baby during pregnancy, birth or breast-feeding.

- **Blood Contact**
Sharing a needle with an infected person / receiving infected blood through a blood transfusion / use of tools, such as razor blades or tattooing needles, contaminated with a virus.

Social contacts such as shaking hands, eating the same food or using the same restroom are not methods for transmission.

RELIGIOUS LEADERS' COMMITMENT TOWARDS HIV/AIDS ISSUES

*Statement of Commitment by Religious Leaders
15th International AIDS Conference, Bangkok, Thailand, 11-15 July 2004.*

The tragic toll of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, as well as its continuous and rapid spread in most parts of the world, brings compelling urgency to the call for new commitment by people of faith to the goal of "Access for All".

The HIV and AIDS crisis is bringing us together because we are all living with HIV and AIDS. We need to share knowledge, understanding and experience from our various religious communities so that our efforts become more and more effective and inclusive. Through this, we will seek to establish a new culture of interfaith cooperation, respecting the uniqueness within our traditions while focusing on our shared values of human dignity and human rights.

Have religious communities done enough to respond to the urgent challenges posed by HIV and AIDS to individuals, communities, and the global human family? As leaders in religious communities, assembled for the 15th International AIDS Conference, in Bangkok, on 11-16 July 2004, we acknowledge with much regret that quite often our response has been one of prejudice, ignorance, fear, and judgmental attitudes.

We are determined to work together and within our communities to:

- Promote the dignity, equality, and rights of all people;
- Discuss openly and accurately the basic facts about the HIV and AIDS and about all effective means of prevention;
- Work to eliminate the root causes of the HIV and AIDS pandemic including gender inequality, prejudice against those whose way of life or sexual orientation is different from the majority community, systemic injustice, and unequal distribution of wealth;
- Overcome silence, stigma, discrimination, denial, and fear regarding HIV and AIDS;
- Reject the negative statements by some faith leaders that AIDS is a form of divine punishment or retribution;
- Advocate for expanded resources to fight against HIV and AIDS;
- Document "good practices" and support research to identify more effective means of prevention and treatment;
- Attain "access for all" – to effective preventive education and knowledge, comprehensive care and treatment, and full inclusion in the community.
- Our religious communities bring rich experience and unique strengths to fulfill these commitments. Specifically, we will carry out the following actions;
- We will implement policies within our structures and institutions in order to combat every

tendency to marginalize people living with or affected by HIV and AIDS as either employees or members within our communities.

- We will advocate for and with people living with or affected by HIV and AIDS in order to obtain lower prices for both medications and laboratory tests and to ensure access to the full range of education, counseling, voluntary testing and care.
- We will call upon those holding political office, in collaboration with all members of the global human family, to fulfill the grave responsibility to make the dream of “Access To All” into an everyday reality in all parts of the world, among all groups of people, and at every level of the socio-economic spectrum and to maintain strict, enhanced and transparent accountability in this regard.
- We will ensure, through educational activities and community gatherings, the inclusion of accurate information about ways to prevent the further spread of HIV.
- We will commit our diverse structures of health care, ranging from highly specialized services to locally-based village clinics, as well as our systems of education, social and community development, to implement these strategies in a comprehensive, universal, and equitable manner.
- We will dedicate additional funds from the resources of our own religious communities in order to scale up our respective contributions to the struggle against the HIV pandemic, and pledge careful stewardship and responsible use of the funds entrusted us by donors from our own communities and from the international community.
- We will involve people living with or directly affected by HIV, many of whom are members of our own religious communities, in the response to this pandemic.
- We will give priority attention addressing the practices within our religious traditions that increase the vulnerability of women and girls who also carry the greatest burden of response in this pandemic.
- We will promote community-based responses to the special needs of children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV and AIDS.
- We will promote preaching and teaching about HIV in our houses of worship and will encourage the designation of special days and / or weeks of prayer and other religious observances to focus on HIV and AIDS.
- We commit ourselves to monitor and evaluate our own progress toward accomplishing the goals that we have articulated in this statement.
- HIV and AIDS know no boundaries. All of our religious communities are living with HIV and AIDS, and yet a common thread in our beliefs is hope inspired by faith. We will not rest until the promise of “Access For All” and the hope of a world without HIV and AIDS is fulfilled.

ST. JOHN'S CATHEDRAL HIV EDUCATION CENTRE

It has been nine years since the St. John's Cathedral HIV Education Centre first became involved in working alongside the HIV affected community. It is our belief that AIDS is not a punishment from God, for God does not wish disease and death to fall upon His people. Instead as children of God, we should work not only to alleviate the suffering caused by the AIDS virus but also to advocate justice for those who are victims of discriminations and injustice in our society. We feel that this is very much in accord with the teaching of the Gospel.

The HIV Education Centre of the St. John's Cathedral (Anglican Church) was the first – and so far has been the only faith-based institution to undertake the AIDS ministry in Hong Kong. It was established in 1995, with the goals to raise AIDS awareness amongst the general public, and to help create a free AIDS society for our generation. The services are offered free of charge and are available to anyone regardless of religion, sexual orientation or nationality.

In Hong Kong, many local churches are very silent about the HIV/AIDS epidemic. It could be due to a lack of knowledge and training in the Church, or stigma and misconceptions held by the clergy. In 2003, we conducted a questionnaire survey to identify the AIDS knowledge of the clergy in Hong Kong, their needs and attitudes towards AIDS-related issues relevant to the local church setting, in the hope of indicating future directions for training, and education for the local clergy and parishioners.

1,152 copies of questionnaires were sent to the clergy of different denominations in Hong Kong, and 304 copies were received (with a response rate of 26.4%).

The results show that clergy still hold misconceptions about AIDS. For instance, 29.3% of the respondents thought that AIDS is spread by homosexuality. 21.4 % believed that AIDS is a punishment from God. Respondents had mixed views about participation of infected parishioners and clergy in Church life. 16.4% said that infected parishioners should not share Communion. 79.4% believed that infected parishioners could still serve in different church positions, but 30.2% believed that infected priests could not do so.

Respondents showed a lack of preparedness to respond to the AIDS crisis. While 70.7% said that the Church was obliged to take care of infected people, less than 10% said their Church was planning to organize activities about AIDS. While 89.9% agreed that the Church should provide AIDS education to parishioners, 33.5% did not consider that AIDS education should be part of theological education. On the content of training for clergy on AIDS, respondents showed a preference of knowledge and skills on AIDS over discussion of sexual issues.

The survey showed that there is much pre-judgment and misinformation, stigma and discrimination which needs to be broken down among the clergy in Hong Kong. More resources should be devoted to better prepare them to respond to the AIDS crisis.

In respond to the above situation, our Centre's main thrust in recent times has been

working at the grassroots level to prevent HIV/AIDS and to educate local women, new arrivals from Mainland China, school youth, Asian Migrant Workers and the church community about their reproductive rights. These projects have seen the development of programmes amongst a section of the population hitherto mostly unmet by activities of the governmental and non-governmental organizations.

At the international level, our Centre works in partnership with many women's groups, faith-based organizations and UN agencies to aggressively fight the AIDS pandemic by combining energies and resources.

For more information

Contact: Miss Elijah Fung, Manager

Address: 4-8 Garden Road, Central, Hong Kong, SAR China.

Email: manager@sjhivctr.com

Tel: (852) 2523 0531, Fax: (852) 2523 1581

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COPYRIGHTS

- *"A Prayer Book for Australia". Copyright 1995, The Anglican Church of Australia Trust Corporation*
- *Christ Church Anglican Cathedral Diocese of Newcastle Australia, World AIDS Day Service 2001*
- *The CCT AIDS Ministry, Thailand*
- *Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, India*
- *St. John's Cathedral HIV Education Centre*
- *Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)*
- *Resources from worship service, "Woman, Great is Your Faith!" Access for All: The Faith Community Responding - An Interfaith Gathering Preparing for the 15th International AIDS Conference, July 2004, Ambassador Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand.*
- *Statement of Commitment by Religious Leaders, 15th International AIDS Conference, Bangkok, Thailand, 11-15 July 2004.*

For enquiry:

- (1) Dr. Prawate Khid-arn
Christian Conference of Asia
96, 2nd District, Pak Tin Village
Mei Tin Road, Shatin, NT, Hong Kong
Tel: (852) 2691 1068, Fax: (852) 2692 4378
Email: prawate@cca.org.hk
Website: [www.cca.org.hk/ Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service](http://www.cca.org.hk/Justice,InternationalAffairs,DevelopmentandService)
- (2) Mr. Wan Hoi-wing
Hong Kong Christian Council
9/F Christian Ecumenical Building, 33 Granville Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong.
Tel: (852) 2368 7123, Fax: (852) 2724 2131
Email: wan@hkcc.org.hk
Website: <http://www.hkcc.org.hk>
- (3) Miss Elijah Fung
St. John's Cathedral HIV Education Centre
4-8 Garden Road, Central, Hong Kong.
Tel: (852) 2523 0531, Fax: (852) 2523 1581
Email: manager@sjhivctr.com
Website: www.sjhivctr.com