

HIV/AIDS and the Church

A COMPASSIONATE RESPONSE



*A Resource
from*

**Samaritan
Ministry**

of Central Baptist
Church of Bearden in
Knoxville, Tennessee

How should Christians feel about HIV and AIDS?

Christians need to look at HIV/AIDS as a disease that can affect anybody. People with HIV or AIDS are in need of love, compassion and care, just like people who suffer from cancer, mental illness, depression, or any other disease. HIV is a virus. Having HIV is not a sin.



What kind of example did Jesus set for our response to this disease?

Jesus teaches over and over again that we should reach out to the sick and offer help and compassion to those in need: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was sick, and you took care of me” (Matthew 25:35-36) and “I demand that you love one another” (John 15:12).

What do people who have HIV need from us?

People with HIV/AIDS need our love. Too often, people with HIV have felt rejected by the church and by Christians. This is often because we don't understand this disease, and we are afraid. Christians need to learn more about HIV and AIDS.



The Prayer of St. Teresa of Avila

*Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet, on earth but yours.
Your are the eyes through which He looks
Compassion on this world
Yours are the feet
With which He walks to do good.
Your are the hands
With which He blesses all the world
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet.
Yours are the eyes, you are His body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours
Yours are the eyes, through which He Looks
compassion on the world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*

How can we respond?

Christians should respond to people who have HIV or AIDS in a positive way. This means we respond with awareness, love and compassion—not prejudice, denial and apathy. Christians need to challenge the negative and judgmental attitudes that still exist toward people with HIV/AIDS.* This means that we talk about HIV and AIDS in church and that we work for social justice and for an end to stigma.



"The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil." Prov. 15:28

Christians need to decrease fear and misconceptions about HIV and AIDS by providing accurate information about HIV and AIDS. Educational programs for people of all ages are important, but youth deserve comprehensive and open discussion about sex and sexuality. Knowledge is power. Ignorance kills.

Christians should provide practical and pastoral support for people living with AIDS and their families. There are many ways that churches can become involved:

- Opening the doors of the church for HIV related community meetings, support groups, etc.



**Don Messer in, Breaking the Conspiracy of Silence.*



- Providing meals and transportation
- Recognizing World AIDS Day (December 1)
- Partnering with an AIDS organization in the community to better serve people living with AIDS

Christians need to engage in prayerful dialogue with other churches, faith communities and secular organizations. When we put aside our denominational differences, Christians can be a powerful force for change. It is possible to work together. In communities all across America, there are secular organizations and gov-



ernmental groups that are doing HIV/AIDS care and education every day. Building partnerships with these groups is a great way to use our resources effectively.

Frequently Asked Questions about HIV and AIDS

What is HIV? What is the difference between HIV and AIDS?

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is the virus that causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). AIDS is a deadly condition that happens when HIV is left untreated. AIDS is advanced HIV disease.

Is the epidemic over in America?

NO. In America more than 56,000 new infections occur every year.

How is HIV spread from one person to another?

HIV is spread when two people have unprotected (no condom) sex and one of them is infected with HIV, known as being HIV positive. Though people also get HIV from sharing needles when using drugs, HIV is most often spread by sexual contact. It is important to know that you cannot get HIV from being around someone who has it. HIV is not spread from kissing, hugging, eating or drinking after someone.

How can you make yourself safe from HIV?

The only way to be 100 percent safe is to not have sex and to not use needles. This is called abstinence. People who are sexually active are putting themselves at risk, but this risk can be greatly reduced with the correct use of condoms.





What happens to someone if they get infected with HIV?

There is no cure for HIV, but treatments (HIV drugs called antivirals) are very effective in reducing the effects of HIV and helping people live a long life. If someone who has HIV can get good medical care, they may not ever have AIDS, but living with HIV is still very difficult.

Where can I get more information about HIV and AIDS?

- Samaritan Ministry offers *The HIV Resource for Churches Kit*, plus other curriculum, outlines, ministry guides and more. www.samaritancentral.org
- *AIDS: Finding Hope and Compassion* (Pamphlet), RBC Ministries, www.rbc.net
- *Positively Aware*, Journal of the Test Positive Aware Network, www.tpan.com
- *The Externally Focused Church* (2004) by Rusaw & Swanson
- Two books by Donald Messer: *Breaking the Conspiracy of Silence* (2004) and *52 Ways to Create an AIDS Free World* (2009)
- Cooperative Baptist Fellowship HIV/AIDS Ministry, www.thefellowship.info/AIDS
- United Methodist HIV/AIDS Ministry, www.umglobalaidsfund.org
- Centers for Disease Control HIV/AIDS Information, www.cdc.gov/hiv
- Complete HIV/AIDS Resource, www.TheBody.com
- Rick & Kay Warren's HIV/AIDS Newsletter, www.hivandthechurch.com
- Comprehensive resource for HIV information, www.stophiv.us



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