

HIV/AIDS and the Church

A COMPASSIONATE RESPONSE

A Response From



*Samaritan
Ministry*

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How should Christians feel about HIV and AIDS?

Christians need to view HIV/AIDS as a disease that can affect anyone. 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 who are living with HIV need our love. All 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.

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 should challenge the negative and judgmental attitudes that still exist toward people with HIV/AIDS.¹ 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.”

Christians should work to decrease fear and misconceptions about HIV and AIDS by providing accurate information based on science. 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.

The Prayer of St. Teresa of Avila

*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 this world.
Yours are the feet
With which He walks to do good.
Yours 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.*

Christians also should provide practical and pastoral support for people living with HIV 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.
- Providing meals and transportation

- Recognizing World AIDS Day (December 1)
- Partnering with local HIV service organizations to better serve people living with HIV

Christians should 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 governmental 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.

**DO YOU CARE
ABOUT WHAT I CARE
ABOUT?**

We should shy away from the need to control or prescribe with whom we can work together to end HIV. Often we seek to work only with other Christians, or even those Christians who agree with our denominational beliefs. Asking the question, “Do you believe what I believe?” will undermine many opportunities to serve. We suggest asking a different question.... “Do you care about what I care about?”

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 35,000 new infections occur every year. ²

How is HIV spread from one person to another?

HIV is spread when two people have condomless sex and one of them is infected with HIV, (known as being HIV positive). We also know that people living with HIV *cannot* spread HIV sexually if they work to keep the virus under control with anti-HIV medications ³. 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?

Multiple factors may increase the likelihood of acquiring HIV. Here are some things to know:

- HIV is mainly spread by having anal or vaginal sex without a condom or without taking medicines to prevent or treat HIV.
- Get tested to know your HIV status.

- Limit your number of sexual partners.
- Get tested and treated for STDs.
- Talk to your health care provider about pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). These medications can protect against HIV.
- There is an increase in new cases of HIV related to sharing needles and other drug injection equipment.

What happens to someone if they become HIV positive?

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, healthy life. If someone who has HIV is engaged in consistent medical care, they may not ever have AIDS, but living with HIV can still be challenging.

Where can I get more information about HIV and AIDS?

- Samaritan Ministry offers many resources for free on our website. www.samaritancentral.org
- Positively Aware, Journal of the Test Positive Aware Network, www.tpan.com
- Two books by Donald Messer: *Breaking the Conspiracy of Silence* (2004) and *52 Ways to Create an AIDS Free World* (2009)
- United Methodist HIV/AIDS Ministry, www.umglobalaidsfund.org
- Centers for Disease Control HIV/AIDS Information - www.cdc.gov/hiv
- DHHS Official HIV Website - HIV.Gov
- Complete HIV/AIDS Resource - www.TheBody.com

References:

¹ Donald Messer: *Breaking the Conspiracy of Silence* (2004)

² HIV Statistics @ HIV.gov

³ “Preventing Passing HIV to Others” @ HIV.gov.

About Samaritan Ministry

Samaritan Ministry is a ministry outreach arm of Central Baptist Church of Bearden in Knoxville, Tennessee. This is a faith-based ministry, founded in 1996, with the parable of the Good Samaritan serving as its founding principle. Working in partnership with many organizations, faith-based and secular, we recognize the need to serve the entire community and to let our clients take the lead in matters of faith. Religious belief or participation is never a condition for assistance provided by Samaritan Ministry. In fact, we use our secular partners as the primary referral source for emergency assistance.



Our Mission:

“Our church should be a beacon of light and hope, by way of Christ, to anyone who suffers from or has family or friends who suffer from HIV.”



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