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People living with HIV/AIDS Prayer Guide

THE ISSUE

Few global health crises have challenged the response of the church more than the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Since its initial rise during the 1980s, more than 78 million people have been infected with HIV and 39 million have died.¹ While a large percentage of people living with HIV/AIDS contract it through sexual intercourse, some fall victim to the disease by using contaminated needles by either drug use or receiving blood transfusions.² HIV/AIDS is more than just a health issue; it affects every area of an infected person's life and every aspect of society.

Although antiretroviral treatments (ART) can keep the virus dormant if taken appropriately, access to them is limited for many of those infected. Availability, cost, time and distance to get to a clinic with the ARTs, and the stigma and shame associated with it, inhibit many from getting proper treatment. Practicalities, like loss of income from missing work (and even loss of employment from repeatedly missing work), make seeking treatment even more difficult. Additionally, in order for the treatments to be effective, those with HIV who do not have any active infections still require 10 percent more calories to stay healthy than an HIV negative person, and those who are fighting infections require 20 to 30 percent more calories for their bodies to heal according to the World Health Organization.

Biblical wisdom can be muddled by frantic efforts of the general population to protect themselves from those living with HIV/AIDS, often resulting in their unjustified punishment.³ Misguided governments of more than 60 countries have in some capacity enacted AIDS-specific laws and public health regulations that inhibit the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS.¹ These laws criminalize people living with HIV/AIDS to some extent, leaving those infected with the disease feeling misunderstood and alienated.

Because of a community's lack of accurate information on how HIV is contracted or its effect on the body, fear and confusion is easily stirred up against those infected with HIV/AIDS. As a result, several stigmas are created from rash judgment which discriminate against people living with HIV/AIDS:

- **Self stigma/internalized stigma** - Many people, after testing positive for HIV, feel that they are cursed, a bad person, worthless, or that life isn't worth living. They also fear the reactions of others, including family, neighbors, and employers. Consequently, many people experiencing symptoms of immunodeficiency simply don't get tested, thereby risking the possibility of infecting others and suffering needlessly without medical treatment.

- **Healthcare stigma** - People living with HIV/AIDS often find themselves stigmatized by the very people they turn to for medical help. For instance, when women with HIV/AIDS in some areas go to the hospital to give birth, the doctors and nurses refuse to help them. They consider it too risky. So the women are left to give birth unassisted in hospital bathrooms. Even in going to a clinic—whether for HIV treatment, malaria medicine, or other common concerns—infected people too often find that the healthcare they receive is not confidential and is shrouded in judgment concerning their HIV status, behavior, or sexual orientation. It is not uncommon for healthcare providers to demand extra payment for treatment, to isolate HIV-infected patients, or to delay or deny them treatment.
- **Employment stigma** - People living with HIV/AIDS may suffer stigma from their co-workers and employers, such as social isolation and ridicule. They may even experience discriminatory practices in their workplace, such as termination or refusal of employment.⁴ This increases the shame of people living with the disease.
- **Community/household-level stigma** - Many people living with HIV/AIDS feel unwelcome or misunderstood by their families. For example, they are often forced to wash their hands in a separate area, eat and sleep away from family members, or leave their home entirely. Many fear being rejected by family and friends if they disclose their HIV status.⁴
- **Restrictions on travel** - As of September 2015, 35 countries have laws that restrict the entry, stay and residence of people living with HIV/AIDS. Restrictions can include the mandatory disclosure of one's HIV status or being subject to a mandatory HIV test, the need for approval to stay, or the deportation of individuals once their HIV-positive status is discovered.^{5,6}

These stigmas make the impact of the disease much worse for people living with HIV/AIDS, resulting in a spiral of severe poverty, isolation, and poor health. But there is something else that many people with HIV/AIDS face on a daily basis: grief. As the disease travels through families and communities, survivors face the slow deaths of loved one after loved one. HIV/AIDS leaves in its wake widows and orphans, as well as bereaved relatives and friends.

While sentiment in the Western Church turned toward compassionate response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the early 2000s, many Christians in the Majority World still believe that HIV/AIDS is a divine judgement against those who contract it. Rather than reaching out to those who are made most vulnerable by this devastating disease, they too often add to the isolation and judgement that people living with HIV/AIDS experience.

In the West, many have assumed that the problem of HIV/AIDS was “solved” with the introduction of ARTs. As the media spotlight has moved on to other issues, so has the Church's engagement. Yet millions still suffer. Each one is deeply loved by their Creator and intimately known by Him.

STATISTICS

At the end of 2013, there were an estimated 35 million [33.2 million–37.2 million] people living with HIV globally. Seventy per cent of the people living with HIV are located in sub-Saharan Africa.¹

There are 4.2 million people 50 years and older living with HIV.¹

Women represent 50% of all adults living with HIV globally. However, in the most-affected region, sub-Saharan Africa, 59% of people living with HIV are women.¹

1.1 million people died of AIDS in 2015, a 45% decrease since its peak in 2005. Deaths have declined due in part to antiretroviral treatment (ART) scale-up. HIV remains a leading cause of death worldwide and the number one cause of death in Africa.⁷

There were about 2.1 million new infections in 2015 or about 5,700 new infections per day. While there have been significant declines in new infections since the mid-1990s, new infections among adults have failed to decline over the past 5 years and incidence is rising in some regions.⁷

While new cases have been reported in all regions of the world, approximately two-thirds are in sub-Saharan Africa, with 46% of new cases in Eastern and Southern Africa.⁷ In India alone, an estimated 2.4 million people are infected with HIV.

HOW TO PRAY

Pray that the **church** will have the strength to hold infinite love and holy standards of sexuality in perfect tension, and thereby be able to serve with compassion and mercy. Pray that the church would also be able to graciously acknowledge with biblical wisdom the very real pain of a person living with HIV/AIDS. Pray for the church to welcome all who are loved by God, regardless of their condition, and to overcome fear and discrimination. Pray for churches to accept and love people living with HIV/AIDS and that judgment wouldn't overshadow their ability to love. Pray for the church to create a supportive environment for them and their families, especially during the grieving process of losing a loved one to HIV/AIDS. Pray for the church to be adequately trained and involved in wholistic development of vulnerable women and children who are most affected by the spread of HIV.

As in Isaiah 61:3, pray that God would bestow on **people living with HIV/AIDS** "a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, a garment of praise instead of spirit of despair...for the display of His splendour," that He would be exalted in their joy amid suffering. Pray for the love of God to surround them, to cast out all fear and rejection. Pray for their health. Pray for them to have the resources necessary to care for their health and access to the medication needed for their particular situation. Since people living with HIV/AIDS require 20-30% more nutrients when dealing with HIV symptoms,⁸ pray that they would specifically be able to have access and availability to adequate nutrition. Pray for the restoration of their identity. Pray for them to know Jesus as the giver of new life.

Pray for the **families** of people living with HIV/AIDS. Pray for them to love and accept the person who has HIV/AIDS. Pray for the families of people living with HIV/AIDS to support each other. For those caring for someone with HIV/AIDS to have strength and compassion as they care for the person. For the families to have the provision necessary to sustain the extra costs involved for people living with HIV/AIDSs. Pray especially that HIV-infected pregnant women would have substantial access to healthcare, education, and resources they need for themselves and their children. Pray for the widows and orphans which result from the loss of family members or caretakers who are infected with HIV/AIDS—that they would be cared for but also find a sense of belonging in their communities. Pray for families and friends who are mourning the loss of loved ones due to complications from HIV/AIDS. Pray against depression and hopelessness in the midst of families acknowledging their grief, that they would find encouragement and comfort from the Father.

Pray that **leaders** in government, healthcare, and the workplace would promote a sense of acceptance that is undergirded by Christian values. Pray for them to see people living with HIV/AIDS as having equal value in society. Pray for them to protect and guard against the exploitation or discrimination of people living with HIV/AIDS and their families.

Pray for **the scientific community** to have divine insight to develop **a safe cure and a vaccine** for HIV/AIDS. Pray that until a cure or vaccine is found, the adequate medication, resources, and screenings would be accessible to the infected individuals.

Pray that families and communities would be adequately educated about the issue of HIV/AIDS to help bring down **social and political stigmas**. Pray for love to triumph over fear and prejudices.

Pray for the **reduction of new infections of HIV**. Pray for the those infected with HIV to have the knowledge and resources to reduce the transmission of HIV. That God would reveal His purposes for sexual relationships and lead people to live accordingly. That women and girls would be protected from unwanted sexual encounters. Pray for mothers to know how to keep their babies safe. And for those using drugs to be freed from the bondage of addictions.

RESOURCES

<http://www.wheaton.edu/Stewardship/HIV-AIDS-Statement>

A theological response to the issue of HIV/AIDS

<http://www.christianaid.org.uk/resources/churches/prayer/hiv-aids.aspx>

<http://mcccchurch.org/world-aids-day-2016/>

More prayer resources

<http://www1.cbn.com/aids-charting-christian-response>

Offers ways for Christians to pray and practical tips to interact with people living with HIV/AIDS

<http://aidsinfo.unaids.org/>

Amazing interactive map with statistics

<http://cana-india.org/cana/>

Has good FAQ on HIV/AIDS

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 40:11, 61:3

Micah 6:8

Matthew 8:1-4

Luke 10:25-37

Romans 8:38-39

1 Corinthians 10:13

Hebrews 4:15, 13:4

SOURCES

1 UNAIDS, "People Living with HIV"

http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/01_PeoplelivingwithHIV.pdf

2 AIDS, "How Do You Get HIV or AIDS?"

<https://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/how-you-get-hiv-aids/>

3 AIDS-Free World, "Criminalization of HIV Transmission"

<http://www.aidsfreeworld.org/planetAIDS/Transmission.aspx>

4 AVERT, "Stigma, Discrimination and HIV"

http://www.avert.org/professionals/hiv-social-issues/stigma-discrimination#footnote27_42rwqyt

5 Human Rights Watch, "Returned to Risk: Deportation of HIV-Positive Migrants"

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/09/23/returned-risk/deportation-hiv-positive-migrants>

6 UNAIDS, "Mapping of Restrictions on the Entry, Stay and Residence of People Living with HIV"

http://data.unaids.org/pub/Report/2009/jc1727_mapping_en.pdf

7 The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, "The Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic"

http://kff.org/global-health-policy/fact-sheet/the-global-hivaids-epidemic/#endnote_link_193996-1

8 World Health Organization, "Nutrient Requirements for People Living with HIV/AIDS," p. 8

http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/Content_nutrient_requirements.pdf