

SUGGESTIONS FOR CHURCH INVOLVEMENT IN HIV/AIDS



SUGGESTIONS FOR CHURCH INVOLVEMENT

“Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the word, this one will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:22-25).

The Church of Jesus Christ ONLY possesses the answers to the crises of misplaced sexual behaviour and the resulting HIV and AIDS diseases in our communities. God is calling the Church to rise up, take the lead and get involved in rescuing a whole generation in Africa, from premature death. This chapter is intended to give ideas for involvement to the local church.

The Different Aspects of HIV and AIDS Involvement

There are three:

- A. **Prevention Side**
- B. **Education/Training Side**
- C. **Care-Giving Side**



A. The Prevention Side

1. Awaken Awareness

Each local church needs to begin to awaken the conscience of people (Christians first then community) that involvement in **the HIV/AIDS crises is their God-given responsibility!** For too long the church has felt it was the world's problem because we are all saints! AIDS is in the church and **so it should be in the church** (God help us if it isn't)!

“Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, ‘Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ When Jesus heard that, He said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matthew 9:10-13).

Pastors need to speak on Biblical sexuality at least **twice each year** in their local churches.

2. Utilise World AIDS Day to Plan an HIV/AIDS Emphasis

World AIDS Day is **December 1 every year**. Utilise a Sunday near to December 1 and perhaps plan a whole week of activities in your church to bring HIV/AIDS awareness to your people. Get them involved during this special time. **This will also send a strong message to your civic and government leaders that your church 'PRACTICALLY' CARES!**

Utilize AIDS Memorial Day & Week in the First Week of May

The first week of May is a memorial week to remember those that have painfully died as a result of AIDS. The church can take this opportunity to plan a special HIV/AIDS emphasis to heighten awareness in your congregants to the AIDS crises and their responsibility in it.

3. Establish a Resource/Volunteers Base in the Church

The local church can either establish its own HIV/AIDS ministry base, or work with an existing community-based HIV/AIDS group that is already functioning. **PLEASE GET INVOLVED!** Seek out people in your congregation who are willing to work. Train them, and begin to get your local church HIV and AIDS ministry together.

One Thing Most Churches Have Is People/Resources

The local church may not have an over-abundance of money, but it does have people! People are the greatest source of resource for involvement in HIV and AIDS ministry as a tool of evangelism. Some of the people that could help your church to develop a successful HIV/AIDS ministry are:

People with skills: health workers, builders, home care people, visitation people

Material resources: food resources, used clothing, medical supplies, toys, AIDS booklets, Christian reading material, loving support, etc.

Facilities venue: the church being a place where HIV/AIDS people can come and receive help

Equipment: beds, household goods, vehicles for transporting, etc.

Land: for possible orphan and street children's home, counselling rooms, a venue to serve as an HIV testing place, etc.

Contacts: begin to link arms with those in your community who also are involved in AIDS Awareness. It can be a way of getting the gospel out in the open arena. **LET YOUR CHURCH'S LIGHT SHINE!**

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good

works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:19).

4. Establish an HIV/AIDS Care Base

You may begin with just one day a week where people can come and you pray with them. BUT START SOMETHING! Build up your care support which can include the following:

Emotional/Spiritual Support - where people ‘infected’ or ‘affected’ can come for prayer and friendship. A place where people can come to receive strength to face death of loved ones from AIDS... and recovery for the hurting as a result of HIV and AIDS.

Basic Needs Support - where people affected/infected can receive help in the home, with children, getting food and medicine, expertise of home-based care for their loved ones, spiritual care for those who are frightened because of AIDS and don’t know Jesus, visitation/friendship, alleviating fear about the disease, and offering the peace of Jesus.

Physical needs of affected/orphaned children - With 15 million or more orphaned African children having no parents and many with no extended family to love and care for them, the Christian Church must get past JUST TALKING ABOUT IT. The church will either DO SOMETHING or we will lose a greater portion of the upcoming generation to sniffing glue, living on the streets, dying of STDs and being slaughtered by AIDS. Realise that in a home that has a family member with HIV/AIDS, it is often the children who are left in need. The church MUST SEEK out these needy children before these precious children’s lives are messed up. Raise up god-fathers/mothers in the local church to become foster parents to these children who become victims of AIDS. The church can develop ‘drop-in’ centers for children without parents, utilising Christian homes/churches during the week.

Testing – work with the local health clinics and offer your church on specific days in the week as an HIV testing station venue. Provide it free; alleviate the fear of testing as the affected come to your church for testing.

Counselling base - The church can be more effective than anyone else in providing trained counsellors to minister to the HIV-infected and affected in pre/post-test counselling. The Church offers THE ONLY HOPE in the AIDS crisis. Begin to train up Christians who can counsel the AIDS/HIV-infected and their loved ones. See Chapter 14 for material.

Hospice/Home care – Some churches will be able to set up a chronic care hospice home where the AIDS-infected can live out their last days with love, adequate care, and in a Christian ‘infected-friendly’ environment.

B. Education Side

1. **Role Models** – The local church can disciple Christian role models who can demonstrate to the non-Christian community that it is possible to:

- Live sexually pure lives.
- Resist sexual temptation..
- Raise morally pure children.
- Not be afraid of the HIV and AIDS-infected.
- To love and care for HIV and AIDS-infected.

Sadly, the non-Christian community is seeing very little positive role modeling in government, on television and radio, and in the community. The church can be living examples of ‘right’ living without being judgemental.

In today’s world the young people are hearing mostly these words from adults:

- Don’t do that because I say so!
- Don’t do as I do; do as I say!
- Don’t do that because it isn’t our tradition!
- Don’t do that because God will get you if you do!

Realise that in today’s world it isn’t enough for this generation to just hear words. Youth today are hearing a wrong message that says, “***If it feels good do it!***” “***Everybody is doing it,***” “***You’re not a woman or a man if you don’t do it.***” Youth today need to see examples in Christian youth and adults that **show** them how to live right! There is no doubt that God’s Church today can say to this generation of young people as Paul said,

“Therefore I urge you, imitate me, For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church”
(1 Corinthians 4:16-17).

“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

“Let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’ be ‘No’” (Matthew 5:37).

A home or church atmosphere which models realistic expectations, godly lifestyle, sexual purity, involvement, care, and compassion will be flooded with young people giving their lives to Jesus Christ! This is the Church’s day to “walk the talk” as never before.

**Deuteronomy 6:6 & 7; Proverbs 22:6; Psalms 127:3-5;
Proverbs 13:24; Ephesians 6:4; 1 Peter 1:16; Proverbs 22:15;
Proverbs 13:24; Proverbs 23:13–14.**

2. **Teach the Biblical standard** - Know what God says about the family and raising moral children. God's standard is **cross cultural** because it is His standard in His Word the Bible. Raise that standard! Example: **parents** are commanded to be the primary teachers of their children about life's principles and godliness, not the aunt/uncle, school, church, initiation school, or anyone else. Those other sources can assist parents in reinforcement of godly principles, but they are not to take the place of parental input.
3. **Have a plan in the church to teach personal sexual purity to the family and upcoming children** - This should be done minimally twice a year, as children respond to repetition. Flip charts for this teaching are in Chapter 24. This teaching should also include AIDS prevention. The local Christian church could easily cover every school child in the community with an HIV/AIDS presentation and gospel message. A motivated local church that is involved could reach every school-aged child in the neighbourhood in a relatively short time!

Remember that statistics taken from America and in Southern Africa found that less than 1% of Christian youth in the Christian Church are receiving teaching to establish Biblical values in the area of morality and sexuality. THE FAMILY AND CHURCH must rise up and do our job...teach and train the children ***"So that when they are older they will not depart from it"*** (Proverbs 22:6).

4. **Train all church leadership in the following:**

These topics should be taught and reinforced in the local church on a yearly basis:

- Sexuality God's way, moral teaching
- Life-skill management at all ages/levels
- Biblical values and lifestyle
- HIV/AIDS Awareness
- Truth about condoms, testing
- STDs, sexual abuse
- How HIV/AIDS affects me and my family
- Ways of church involvement in social issues relating to the community

Note: Where possible utilise other good Christian resources available to you.

Examples are:

- Christian videos
- Christian tapes
- AIDS resource material from **Africa...Operation Whole**
- Assemblies of God booklet ***Edward The Elephant Says Help Stop AIDS*** as well as other materials from them

- Utilise what you can of community resources including NGO's and Ministry of Health/Education materials. Note: when you come to a concept that is non-Biblical, use it to give the Biblical view. Example: some organisations stress the condom as being the answer to the AIDS crises with very little said about moral behaviour and choices. The church can compare that teaching with the truth of God's Word and use what they can.

5. Provide lay training in AIDS awareness and include people from the community -

This is an excellent way to show people in the church and community that you are serious about stopping HIV/AIDS and are willing to DO SOMETHING PRACTICAL ABOUT IT. Allow the open door of AIDS training to be the platform to take the gospel message of salvation through Jesus Christ. Make the ministries of your local church known through AIDS involvement. Some areas of involvement to give AIDS awareness programs and an evangelism thrust would be:

- Schools/universities
- Prisons
- Workplaces
- Civic centres
- Armed forces/military camps
- Villages in rural areas, and in the urban centres
- Professional people and business employees
- Target difficult places to reach:
 - homosexual community
 - prisons
 - traditional healers/sangomas
 - prostitutes/truckers
 - street children/orphans
 - special interest groups

6. Challenge discrimination and stereotyping in the disease of AIDS

Constantly train people to see HIV/AIDS-infected people as any other sick people who need our love and care. Demonstrate by example, that the church welcomes AIDS-infected people amongst them. Dispel the notion that only gay, street, or bad people get AIDS. Bring in various HIV+ people to the church so that personal identification with the disease is made easier.

7. Encourage stopping the spread of HIV by teaching about HIV testing

- Role model by getting tested yourself if you are a church leader. Take the fear out of testing.
- Help people in the community to understand that 90% of HIV-infected do not know they are infected and continue to spread it to those they love.
- Develop a policy whereby all those anticipating marriage are **tested twice** at least six months in advance of their marriage.

Note: This will cut down on the spread of AIDS by HIV-infected individuals passing it on to others. People can make testing become easier by getting tested themselves, whether high-risk or not! Government clinics will usually HIV test without charge.

8. Develop a church policy and methodology to deal with sexual abuse and molestation -

Two out of every five girls are molested and two out of every six boys are molested before ten years old. The church cannot remain passive on this issue. The local church can teach parents how to protect their own children from sexual abuse. Let children in the community know that you are there to help them if sexual abuse has occurred. Children will not seek out help from the church relative to abuse if there is no help for them. Help will not be forthcoming if there is no church policy and training to deal with these issues.

9. Constantly reinforce the Biblical teaching of God-given self-empowerment

over one's own body and sexual urges as follows:

- Men and/or women can help themselves from being promiscuous.
- Women do have a choice over their own sexuality and body.
- Men/women do not have the right to sleep around and then take HIV home to kill their spouse and children.
- Mothers have a responsibility to get tested before getting pregnant.
- HIV-infected mothers must be taught alternate methods of feeding baby besides breastfeeding. Here the Church can help reduce infant mortality of infected babies by providing instruction in non-breasting feeding procedures and nutritious milk formula procedures.

10. Integrate church AIDS Awareness with existing community-based AIDS Awareness programs -

This way the local church can positively challenge non-Biblical ideas about sexuality, and bring in God's way. Rather than totally reinventing the wheels, you can complement existing community-based programs, allowing this to be a way of shining for Jesus in these organisations:

- GOs
- Government programs
- Interfaith programs
- Civic programs
- Private programs

Demonstrate solidarity with the rest of the community leadership. To be effective, the local church should not take a "lone-wolf" approach. This will not produce positive results and will not be a positive witness to the gospel of Christ. The local Christian church can build bridges with the community; do not burn bridges! Let your community, city, and nation know that THE CHURCH is standing with them in the AIDS crises...we are the **HEAD NOT THE TAIL** in being LIGHTS in the darkness of AIDS.

11. Provide support for all HIV/AIDS areas of community need:

- Pre/post test counseling
- Various forms of HIV/AIDS care including HIV + mothers
- Child/family/youth support
- Bereavement and death preparedness and counselling services
- Using HIV/AIDS infected people where you can, assisting them in their own self-worth in providing work, and also helping to get the AIDS message out to the community

C. Care-Giving Side

1. Provide practical HIV/AIDS assistance

Care is needed for both for the **affected** and the **infected**. This can progressively grow to involve:

- Counselling
- Material help for HIV-affected families and HIV-infected persons
- Bereavement/death/dying assistance
- Medical help or direct to medical care
- Testing
- Orphans, street children, commercial sex workers and the homeless

2. Provide godparents (mother and/or father figure) to children who need help

- Train and provide Christian foster homes for parentless children
- Assist orphaned children with education, uniforms, clothing and fees
- Engage in a street children's feeding ministry
- Visit orphanages and be friends with the children
- Provide specialised ministries for children without parents
- Provide medical help and transport for disadvantaged children

3. Hospice/Terminally-ill care for those without families

- Help families to care for their own who are HIV/AIDS-infected, without fear
- Develop Christian hospice AIDS care in the community

4. Target financial resources for AIDS awareness ministry in your church overall budget -

Do not wait for one of the church members to be in crisis due to AIDS before the church plans for money that is set aside for such cases. It will not be long until AIDS will hit every local church. It is better to be prepared with money on hand to deal with these desperate situations. Already in Africa, some local church pastors are conducting 10 or more funerals each week. A local church that has not planned for 'ministry people' and 'money resources' when AIDS hits, will find themselves in very difficult circumstances. Build up a reserve if you can to help with:

- HIV/AIDS care situations for extended church families hit with AIDS
- Parents who cannot work due to AIDS and provide for their children
- Funeral expenses for those who cannot afford to pay

5. **Provide condoms to married people where one person is HIV infected and the spouse is not** - Provide expertise in how to correctly use a condom and direct them to appropriate Christian medical persons who can instruct them so as not to further infect the family unit. This would also include counseling and instruction for preventative care in handling HIV/AIDS patients who are excreting body fluids. While the condom in this case is not 100% effective, it can help married couples where either spouse is HIV infected.
6. **Make a plan to utilise your church buildings and members' homes to meet the HIV/AIDS crisis in the community.** Mobilising church resources and making an effective plan to utilise what we already have **WILL RESULT IN A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE IN THE AIDS CRISIS IN THE COMMUNITY.** The Church's problem has not been lack of people, resources, or the mandate to help in HIV/AIDS. It has been lack of a **plan, vision, and determination** to do what Jesus has commanded us! **THE CHURCH CAN HELP!**

REMEMBER: THERE IS NO GOVERNMENT OR SYSTEM THAT IS GOING TO BE ABLE TO ADEQUATELY SUPPLY THE PEOPLE RESOURCES AND FINANCES NEEDED FOR THE AIDS CRISIS IN AFRICA. AS AIDS BECOMES MORE WIDESPREAD, THE CHURCH MUST GET ACTIVELY INVOLVED...NOT PASSIVELY INVOLVED! WE CAN DO IT BECAUSE JESUS LIVES IN US AND HE COMMISSIONED US TO DO IT!!!