



# STRETCH OUT YOUR HANDS

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A WORLD AIDS DAY COMMUNITY WORSHIP SERVICE

*Wednesday, December 1, 2004, anticipating second Sunday of Advent, December 5, 2004*

**W**orld AIDS Day is an important occasion for building awareness and joining our lives and spirits in response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic in our communities and around the world. The numbers alone of those with HIV/AIDS are overwhelming. Through this worship service, however, people may connect with the reality of human need and the spiritual inspiration and empowerment required for effective response. In this service, worshipers have the opportunity to remember loved ones and others who have died, learn about HIV/AIDS globally and locally, and receive inspiration of faith to respond and join in efforts to end HIV/AIDS throughout the world.

This service is designed for an ecumenical Christian worship. Collaboration with ecumenical leaders in the community is encouraged and important to building lasting relationships between congregations. If the service is to be interfaith, modify this service accordingly by incorporating readings, prayers, and hymns from various faith traditions.

In planning for the "Remembrances" section of the prayers, please consider the following options: You may wish to collect the names of persons who have died prior to the service and ask one or more persons to read them, or the leader may ask persons attending the service call out the names of persons. If the latter is chosen, you may wish to instruct the congregation at the beginning of the prayers. If you choose to light a candle for each name, planners will need to determine how to facilitate this in light of the number of names, expected attendance, and fire codes.

## Gathering

*(As people gather, special music may be performed or played. Songs of praise may also be sung, helping to place the gathered in a spirit for worship.)*

## Welcome and Introduction

*(Someone may offer words of welcome and share words of introduction about the service and matters of hospitality.)*

## Call to Worship

One: God of all creation, your faithful and steadfast love brings us together and opens the door to new possibilities.

**People: We gather in praise.**

One: We come together expecting to be surrounded by your presence and awed by your promise of life and abundance.

**People:**           **We gather in joy.**

One:                When we are faced with impossible odds, when suffering and death are all around us, you lift us up and create a way out of no way.

**People:**           **We gather in hope.**

One:                When we are confounded by ignorance and consumed with fear, you give us the courage and confidence we need to move forward.

**People:**           **We gather in love.**

One:                When we feel we have been abandoned and are left to fend for ourselves, you are there to accompany us.

**People:**           **We gather in community.**

One:                In the face of our differences and divisiveness, you challenge and surprise us with reconciliation.

**People:**           **We gather in peace.**

One:                In the places where some get what they need and others don't, you move us from complacency to join in the struggle for justice and equality.

**People:**           **We gather in solidarity.**

One:                When we are stuck in our own ways and fixed on what makes us comfortable, you challenge us with your newness and creativity.

People:             We gather with open minds.

One:                When we turn away from those who suffer or grieve, the cross stands before us, reminding us of the depth of your love.

**People:**           **We gather with open hearts.**

One:                When we hold on so tightly to what we have that we are not touched by another's need, your presence emboldens us to risk reaching out.

**People:**           **We gather with open hands.**

One:                When we are burned-out and our souls feel empty, you come and fill us to overflowing.

**People:**           **We gather in the power of the Spirit**

**All People:**       **We gather together in worship, O God. We pray for your presence with us as we lift up those who are living with HIV/AIDS. We remember those who have died. Be in our midst. Inspire and empower us that we may respond with compassion and in solidarity. Together, may we be a healing force in this world. Help us, with you, to bring an end to HIV and all that enables its spread near and far. Amen.**

## Greetings of Peace

*(As a sign of God's of reconciliation and peace, all may greet those around them with an embrace or a handshake, accompanied by words as: "The peace of God be with you," and the response: "And also with you.")*

**Hymn** "God Is Here! As We Your People Meet"

TNCH 70

## Special Music or other Artistic Expression

### Testimonials

*(Two or three persons may be invited to each offer a brief testimonial about their experience with HIV/AIDS from the perspective of faith. Planners may wish to select these persons in advance of the service.)*

## Suggested Readings from the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures

Isaiah 51:12–16

Psalms 28

Luke 6:1–11

## Special Music or other Artistic Expression

### Sermon

**Hymn** "Won't You Let Me Be Your Servant"

TNCH 539

### Prayers

**One:** Gracious, loving, and compassionate God, we praise you. By the power of your Holy Spirit, you work through your servants to bring healing and hope to a world full of suffering and pain. We call upon you, O God. Send your Spirit on us in a new and powerful way. Work in and through us to bring an end to HIV/AIDS.

**People:** **God, in your mercy, hear our prayers.**

**One:** We pray for the world's children who are living with HIV or AIDS and who continue to be so vulnerable in the wake of this pandemic—the millions who have lost their parents, their homes, their teachers, their innocence. For the sake of the children, O God, wake your people across the world to do everything in our power to provide for every need—the care, nurture, and support that truly leaves no child behind.

**People:** **God, in your mercy, hear our prayers.**

**One:** We pray for all who are vulnerable and at risk for becoming infected with HIV, and all the conditions that create environments of vulnerability and risk. Help us to break the silence, to address the issues of poverty and gender inequality, to work effectively in multiracial and multicultural ways, and for quality education.

**People:**           **God, in your mercy, hear our prayers.**

One:               We pray for the caregivers who work with few resources and face the daunting task of bringing care and comfort in the most difficult circumstances. We pray for those who struggle to offer quality care without access to the needed medications. God refresh those who burn out because they experience working so long in such dire conditions. May your spirit of hope and renewal touch their lives and compel us to reach out in networks of support.

**People:**           **God, in your mercy, hear our prayers.**

One:               We pray for all those who are working to address the many concerns HIV brings to our lives and to our world. We pray for grassroots networks and for national and international aid agencies. Bless them in their work and inspire them with your creative spirit. Increase our capacity to serve those in need and address the underlying issues that fuel this disease.

**People:**           **God, in your mercy, hear our prayers.**

One:               We pray for world leaders, governments, and all those responsible for public policies. Grant them your wisdom and your passion for justice—to provide life-saving medications to the poor, to increase health care and education, and to work globally not only to stop the spread of HIV, but to bring an end to poverty.

**People:**           **God, in your mercy, hear our prayers.**

One:               We pray for faith communities everywhere. Perfect in us your vision of health and wholeness for your world. Help us move beyond fears and prejudices. Enliven generosity so we may commit our hearts and voices—our time, energies, and treasures—to your healing ministry in the world. Empower us to faithfully provide the leadership required and to be a compassionate community of healing and solidarity with all your children.

**People:**           **God, in your mercy, hear our prayers.**

*(Moment of silence for personal prayers and meditation)*

## **Remembrances**

One:               Remembering that tears are cleansing as well as painful; remembering that telling the stories not only reiterates, but renews hope; remembering that in holding one another, we reweave the world with God's sacred joy, we now remember those who have died.

*(Names may be offered of those who have died. A candle may be lit for each person named. After all have been named, a moment of silence may be observed for personal prayers and remembrances. At the end of the silence, the leader may say, "Amen.")*

## **Offering**

*(An offering may be received to support efforts to address HIV/AIDS locally and globally. A song of praise or other special music may be offered during the collection. A prayer of thanksgiving and dedication may be offered for the gifts received.)*

## **Hymn**

**"We Shall Not Give Up the Fight"**

TNCH #437

## **Sending Forth and Blessing**

**One:** It is God's will that the world be healed of HIV/AIDS.

**People:** **We believe that all things are possible with God.**

**One:** It will require an enormous effort on our part, the likes of which the world has never known.

**People:** We commit to join that effort believing that all things are possible with God.

**One:** No one can do it alone, but all of us together can make a difference.

**People:** **We stand in solidarity believing that all things are possible with God.**

**One:** Go, therefore, love and serve God. Be a healing presence and live in solidarity as God's people. And may the love of God, the peace of Christ, and the power of the Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

*(After the service, provide an opportunity for persons to learn more about HIV/AIDS globally and in your community. Links to educational materials and other resources are available on the UCC web site, or by contacting the HIV/AIDS and Global Health Office of Wider Church Ministries at 866.UCC.UCC4, ext. 3217.)*

TNCH refers to hymns or resources from *The New Century Hymnal* (Cleveland, Pilgrim Press, 1995). Similar hymns or resources may be found in other hymnals.



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