Order of Service for World AIDS Day 2016

Before the service begins, place a red ribbon on a large cross and place a world map where people can see it. Then distribute red ribbons and an order of service to each congregation member as they enter the worship space.

Words of Welcome

Welcome to our World AIDS Day Service. World AIDS Day reminds us that HIV has not gone away. There is still a vital need to increase awareness; fight prejudice, stigma and discrimination; improve education; increase access to testing and treatment; raise funds and promote human rights.

Today we pray for all people who are living with HIV. We remember those who have died from AIDS-related illnesses. We give thanks for the progress that has been made; and ask God to give us strength and courage to stand up together to eliminate AIDS as a public health threat.

Today, we pray for religious leaders who are leading by example and are being tested themselves for HIV, showing that having the test done is not a statement about morality, but a health practice that all should do.

Gathering song

Ask participants to light candles or place red ribbons on the map, in countries of the world where they know people living with HIV and/or people who have died of AIDS-related illnesses.

Call to Worship

Gracious loving Father,

We praise you for who you are and for the wonderful diversity in this world you have created. We thank you for the gift of life and for the bounties that you have provided so that we may enjoy that gift. But we know that the bounties are not shared equally by all. We recognize that HIV remains one of the most critical areas needing intervention today. As the epidemic rages on and threatens to become much worse, we would ask for your guidance to world leaders so that they ensure that the epidemic is brought to an end.

It is also the season in Advent, when we celebrate the coming of your son, Jesus Christ and his saving grace. But we remind ourselves that Christ came, not just for a few of us, but for all of your children, especially the outcast, the poor, the weak, the diseased, the marginalized.
In this time of HIV and AIDS, we know that the marginalized are especially vulnerable. We know that rejection by society increases their risk. We know that stigma stops them from seeking help, from getting tested, and from receiving treatment. We know that if Christ were here on Earth today, he would reach out and comfort those who are touched by HIV and AIDS, just as, in his day, he reached out and comforted those touched by leprosy, who also were marginalized by society.

And we remind ourselves that we are Christ's instruments on Earth, his hands, his feet, his heart, and that he expects us to reach out in his name to the outcast, the poor, the weak, the diseased, the marginalized. We know that Christ expects us to welcome all of your children into our churches and lives, including those touched by HIV, so that they also will feel the grace and love that he has shown to us.

But we confess that we often fall short of Christ’s expectations, that we are not always the instruments that he would have us be. We wish to serve, but we know that pride, greed, ignorance, and fear often become barriers that prevent us from serving as we wish we could.

We would ask that you help us overcome those barriers that would grant us the humility, the grace, the wisdom, and the courage to be the servants you want us to be, the servants that Christ needs us to be. Help us to reach out to the rejected, to give hope to the hopeless, to give strength to the weary, to be a voice for the voiceless, to show love to the unloved, so that your kingdom will come, and your will will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.

We ask this in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen

Prayer by Dr David Barstow, EMPACT Africa

Reflection

The Book of Job tells us of a righteous man whose life went totally off track. In short order his livestock were slaughtered by his enemies, his wealth and social standing vanished, and his children died when a building collapsed on top of them. Job’s life became a nightmare of grief. In the midst of his suffering three steadfast friends came to sit with and comfort him. For seven days and nights they sat beside him in silence, simply offering witness to their dear friend’s pain.

That’s not a bad place to start—sitting with another in their pain—but unfortunately Job’s friends started to speak. And when they did, each of them in their own way beseeched Job to search his heart and identify the grievous sins that must have led to these horrors. Surely, they said, Job was paying a price for sin. After each spoke, Job steadfastly maintained that he had done nothing worthy of these tragedies. And then he turned to his friends and said,

*I also could talk as you do, if you were in my place; I could join words together against you, and shake my head at you.*

*I could encourage you with my mouth, and the solace of my lips would assuage your pain.*” (Job 16:4-5)
By the grace of God, HIV infection is no longer a death sentence and we have many powerful medicines that allow people to live with HIV for years without symptoms. But in too many places, living with HIV still means social isolation and stigma and shame. And many people of faith still turn to those living with HIV and ask them what bad things they did to become HIV positive. They demand an accounting of sin before doling out grudging toleration. That’s not compassion, but a self-righteous judgment, the exact opposite of compassion.

We pray that our communities can learn the lessons from the book of Job and that we will stand with sisters and brothers living with HIV, offering them hospitality both in our silent solidarity and when we speak.

Today, religious leaders are going one step further. By taking an HIV test themselves, they are breaking down the false divide between the “not infected” and “the sinners”, throwing out these labels to remind us that regardless of our HIV status, we are all beloved children of God. They are acknowledging that HIV infects people from all walks of life, including pastors, preachers, and priests. As they take a test they are asking us to imagine what would happen if the tables were turned and to consider what it means to live with HIV. By doing this, religious leaders bring Job’s final words to his friends alive today: “I also could talk as you do, if you were in my place; I could join words together against you, and shake my head at you. I could encourage you with my mouth, and the solace of my lips would assuage your pain.”

Let us all pray that regardless of our status we will love and support our neighbors living with HIV. Let us pray for God’s help to refrain from offering words against those living with HIV or shaking our head at them in scorn. Let us pray for God’s help to encourage one another with words and actions which offers solace that assuages our shared pain. Dear God, let it be so. Amen.

Reflection prepared by John Blevins, Presbyterian Church – USA

Music

Reading: John 9:1-11

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” Some claimed that he was.

Others said, “No, he only looks like him.”
But he himself insisted, “I am the man.”

“How then were your eyes opened?” they asked.

He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.”

Reflection

Jesus heals a blind man. The people are asking why he is blind. Jesus, as he often does, does something unexpected. He tells them that the blindness isn’t about sin, neither of the blind man or his parents. He tells them they are asking the wrong question, that instead of looking for someone to blame, they should look for the works of God.

The church has often stigmatized, marginalized and rejected people living with HIV. When we defy stigma and discrimination by accepting people from whom they are and love them unconditionally, without judgment; when we ask what we can do and how we can help, sincerely and honestly; when we lead by example, we reveal the works of God.

People saw the works of God because he healed the blind man. People will see the works of God today through how we treat people who are sick or vulnerable or marginalized. Getting tested is a concrete example of that.

Reflection prepared by Karen Plater, The Presbyterian Church in Canada

Prayer

Spirit of the living God, you breathe on all that is fragile and strong, competent and inadequate, broken and whole. We give you thanks for the gift of life and the life-giving power of your Spirit, which renews andrefreshes us with hope.

May we know your call to be leaders in this struggle and employ the courage, wisdom and resources you have given to respond to HIV and AIDS.

We pray for the leadership of those living with or affected by HIV and give thanks for the courage you give us to share our stories. We thank you that our stories raise awareness, invite solidarity and challenge us to join with one another in the struggle.

May we know your call to be leaders in this struggle and employ the courage, wisdom and resources you have given to respond to HIV and AIDS.

We pray for your church. Be with us and guide us as we respond to the needs of persons living with or affected by HIV. We pray especially for our pastors and lay leaders as they provide pastoral services. Inspire and empower them to provide the leadership our faith community needs to respond effectively.

May we know your call to be leaders in this struggle and employ the courage, wisdom and resources you have given to respond to HIV and AIDS.
We pray for our public officials. Be with them and guide them in their response to HIV and AIDS. Give them courage, wisdom and resources that they may create effective and just public policies so that everyone may receive the information they need to stop the spread of HIV and everyone may access the treatment and care required for their health and wholeness.

May we know your call to be leaders in this struggle and employ the courage, wisdom and resources you have given to respond to HIV and AIDS.

We give you thanks, O God, that you have raised-up leaders throughout the ages—reluctant leaders, courageous leaders, surprising leaders, humble leaders, servant leaders—bestowing on each one gifts for service. Raise up among us such leaders today who will lead by example, fighting against stigma and discrimination and promoting HIV testing. Raise up among us such leaders today who create universal access to medical treatment and health care, lead effective education and prevention programs, advocate for strong and just public policy, and raise funds and other resources to stop AIDS.

May we know your call to be leaders in this struggle and employ the courage, wisdom and resources you have given to respond to HIV and AIDS. Amen.


Reading: John 10:11-12

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it.

Leading by Example: A religious leaders statement about HIV testing

Religious Leaders are called to serve the world. We Christian Brothers say our mission is determined by the cry of the Earth and the cry of those made poor. The HIV virus has spread in our time and wrought enormous damage and caused great suffering. It has increased poverty and set back sustainable development in many parts of the world. Yet it’s an important part of our world. Religious Leaders know that the truth will set us free, as Jesus promised. Religious Leaders can act with courage and confidence in being tested. Without the clarity of such information, we cannot make the sort of decisions Jesus call for.

Brother Moy Hitchen, EDMUND RICE INTERNATIONAL

Reflection

“Let start building!” So they committed themselves to the common good. (Nehemiah 19)
The book of Nehemiah starts the story of a collective crisis. Jerusalem was in captivity. “Great trouble and shame” are the words used to describe the situation of the people (Neh 1:3). The helplessness of the situation is symbolically signified by the destruction of the walls and gates of Jerusalem. What is broken down are not just the wall and the gates - but people’s dignity and morale. Despair and devastation reign.

It is in the midst of this despair that Nehemiah decides to act decisively. Using his privileged position of access to the King Artaxerxes he strives to transform the situation. How does he accomplish the transformation? He **lobbies** and **mobilises**. Nehemiah lobbies the king for letters that will give him ease of passage to Judah. He also mobilises resources – essential timber – which will be of practical help to complete the task he has undertaken. The uniqueness of Nehemiah’s efforts is not just in envisioning change but in envisaging practical ways of translating his vision into action. He is strategic and persuasive.

Nehemiah does not just mobilize material resources, he also mobilizes people’s support. He effectively communicates his vision and his conviction and manages to inspire others to join his efforts. He helps people to see the big picture – the greater common good, transforming individual initiative into corporate commitment through his imaginative and inspiring leadership. Once convinced, the people respond with commitment and courage. Nehemiah’s role reminds us that change is fostered by: **initiative** which transcends our comfort zones, **imagination** which is grounded in concrete action and **inspiration** which leads by example and becomes infectious. It is this combination which can foster change and further transformation even in the midst of despair and devastation.

This type of leadership is what we are calling religious leaders and all people of faith to do by taking a test for HIV and encouraging others to do the same. Lead by example, and inspire others to do the same.

**Scriptural affirmation** (based on 1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

For just as the body is one and has many members, And all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

We are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Amen

**Act of solidarity**

*To be the change is to be the leader. Ask participants to be agent of change against the stigma and discrimination that surround HIV and AIDS limiting access to testing,*
treatment, care and support for all those in need. Invite participants to commit to get tested themselves by signing an action sheet which gives information on HIV and HIV testing.

Music

Closing Prayer

Voice 1: Loving God, In the midst of fear and suffering, we pray that all those who are affected by HIV and AIDS would experience your merciful love through their loved ones and through people around them.

Voice 2: We pray that all the children who are affected by HIV will never be abandoned or marginalized but instead they will be loved and cared for no matter what condition of health they are in.

Voice 3: We pray for the resilience and strength in the hearts of those who are responding to HIV, so that will never give up hope.

Voice 4: We pray for the healing of our human family on earth from brokenness, sadness and separation due to HIV and all kinds of sicknesses.

Voice 5: We pray for faith in our heart, knowing that You are always present with us, especially in our brothers and sisters who are living with HIV or AIDS today. Amen

Prayer prepared by Fr. John Toai, MI Order of St Camillus, Ministers of the Sick, Vietnam

Sending out

Go out into the world and take with you the hope of God our creator that one day we will have a world with zero-new HIV infections, zero AIDS-related deaths and zero stigma and discrimination. Amen

Music

Service prepared by the World Council of Churches – Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance