

Biblical Foundation

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The Bible informs and inspires Christian involvement in the HIV and AIDS crisis, providing motivation, comfort, and challenges. Whether we are exploring passages of the Old Testament or confronting the teachings of Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament, Christians draw strength and solace in the battle against HIV and AIDS.

The African New Testament scholar, Musa W. Dube, has helped Christians to read the Bible in light of the current health crisis. In her lectures and writings, she has highlighted the relevance of scriptural texts to the suffering, stigmatization, and struggle of 33 million people around the world. She has brought fresh insight into reading the Gospels as we renew our understanding of the Great Physician, Jesus Christ, who spent his earthly life proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom, and teaching and healing.

Look at the words of the Hebrew Bible and be reminded of the lament of the psalmist as one thinks of the 28 million persons who have died as a result of this vicious virus. Think of the persistent scriptural imperative to “care for the widow and the orphan.” Or hear anew the thundering voices of the prophets speaking out against injustice, and imagine how persons have suffered great indignities, stigmatization, and discrimination. Ask what Micah is calling us to do in the AIDS crisis when he declares: “What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8) Surely, justice and mercy include doing all we can to provide health care to those infected with HIV and to provide education to prevent others from contracting this virus.

Re-read the life of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels—it is shocking to discover how he repeatedly encounters crowds of sick persons. For example, near the end of Matthew 4, we are told that, everywhere he went, he was engaged in healing the ill. He did so without stigmatizing the sick, asking how they got ill, or treating some ill persons as unworthy of treatment and care. Jesus showed no preferences or prejudice, but repeatedly told his disciples “to heal every kind of disease and illness,” (Matthew 10:1). In Matthew 5, he delivers the Sermon on the Mount. He begins with the Beatitudes, asserting that “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” Christians are called to a ministry of healing, showing compassion and care to the infected and the affected, and educating every generation on how to keep from getting infected.

The tragedy of the contemporary church has been its failure to follow the Great Physician. Unlike Jesus, who especially reached out to the leper, the marginalized, the ostracized, and unloved in his society, many Christians have rejected and mistreated persons who are HIV positive. Even their families have suffered from the church’s callousness.

However, Christians can repent and catch a new vision of Christ’s mission in today’s world. One night, the apostle Paul had a vision and saw a man of Macedonia standing before him and pleading, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” (Acts 16:9) This experience for Paul and his companions was a turning point in their mission and ministry. “Immediately,” they sought to get to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called them.

Likewise, today, we hear the voices of more than 33 million people plus their families and loved ones around the world saying “come over . . . and help us.” Christians cannot tolerate genocide of indifference. This call from God prompts us to preach and teach of God’s healing love and to mobilize militias of mercy to help with programs of education, prevention, care, and treatment. The



biblical basis of the United Methodist Global AIDS Fund moves us from apathy to action and condemnation to compassion.

What follows are a few selected "Texts for Preaching, Teaching, and Prayer." Re-reading these texts and others throughout the Bible trigger within the preacher's and the teacher's heart and mind sermons and lessons that will engage Christians on the front line of the quest to create an AIDS-free world.

Texts for Preaching, Teaching, and Prayer

(Excerpt from Circuit Rider, July/August 2007, Conspiracy of Hope)

1. *"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. . . . Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil . . . thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."* (Ps. 23: 1, 4, 6)
Because of AIDS, millions of people worldwide are walking "through the valley of the shadow of death," but thanks to programs providing care, counseling, and treatment, they are experiencing God's "goodness and mercy."
2. *"Here my prayer, O Lord; let my cry come to you. Do not hide your face from me on the day of my distress."* (Ps. 102:1-2)
Instead of being overwhelmed by the pain and suffering of the world, or living in denial of human realities, **pray for God's strength in becoming constructively involved in the global AIDS crisis.**
3. *"I can do all things through him who strengthens me."* (Phil. 4:13).
No problem, whether it is personally facing ill health or raising funds to help others through the United Methodist Global AIDS Fund, is impossible. God is actively involved in healing and we are called to join in God's great mission of hope.
4. *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."* (John 10:10)
HIV is a thief that steals life. Educating people about how to prevent becoming infected is a life-giving ministry.
5. *"Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution . . ."* (Rom. 8:35)
God loves everyone, but people universally say that worse than having the disease is the way others, including Christians treat them. God's message to every person living with HIV and AIDS is of loving acceptance. God's call to us is to demonstrate that inclusive spirit.
6. *"There was a rich man . . . who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table."* (Luke 16:19-21).
No vaccines or cures exist for AIDS, but life-sustaining medicine is available along with needed nutritious food. Yet the poor are denied these resources. God calls the rich to share so we can end hunger and bring health and hope to sick people around the world.
7. *"A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."* (Matt. 2:18).
More than 15 million children have been orphaned because of AIDS; millions more are infected with HIV. Who will comfort and care for these children? What is God calling us to do?