

MINISTRY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE HIV/AIDS PANDEMIC

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1. Introduction

- HIV/AIDS makes a severe development crisis in developing countries
- The pandemic nature of HIV/AIDS should be outlined from the onset
- The global evangelical Christian community must accept the exceptionality of HIV/AIDS
- There simply is no precedent for this scourge in human history
- We cannot have an illusion that the world will return to what was before AIDS
- In short AIDS has rewritten the rules
- Aids threatens not just some societies but the whole humanity

2. A short excursion of the church's initial responses

- The initial response of the church towards HIV/AIDS was based on ignorance
- The church thought that AIDS is shameful and cannot be associated in anyway with the church
- The church was apathetic and uninvolved
- Most Christians saw AIDS as a curse from God
- The argument often with racial overtones, goes something like this:
“AIDS is a gay plague, borne by promiscuity from countries where blacks live. AIDS is a curse, visited by a just and vengeful God, on sexual deviants as a punishment for their deviance”
- The church has been judgmental
- It serves them right!
- AIDS is God's punishment
- The infected and affected were stigmatized
- Negative attitude and prejudice were the order of the day
- Textual citation was also sought: “Deuteronomy 28:20-29, Numbers 25:1-3, Romans 13:13, 1 Corinthians 5:11, etc.
- This vicious cycle of ignorance should be broken!

3. Contextualization (ministry & missions) in the light of HIV/AIDS

- The gospel does not change but the context of preaching the gospel and doing missions keeps on changing
- The church's understanding of its mission and mandate experiences paradigmatic shifts from time to time
- Its becomes imperative for the church to re-shape and re-think its mission
- HIV/AIDS presents new ministry and missions concepts
- Teaching and outreach paradigm change
- Issues around sexuality
- Climate of love, caring, acceptance and support

4. Biblical basis for such a theological and missiological response

- Christ as our model
 - John 2:1-11 – Jesus uses a non-traditional setting to reach out to the lost
 - John 13:27-29 – The disciples assume that Jesus was going to buy food for the poor ... why would they entertain such an assumption if Jesus and the disciples did not have such a social developmental ministry
 - Matthew 25:31-44 Social care of those hurting in the light of eschatology
- Pauline theology
 - 1 Corinthians 12:27 - Paul mentions the gift and/or ministry of helps (social developmental ministry) alongside the so-called power ministries
- Lukan theology
 - Luke 10:25-35 - The parable of the so-called Good Samaritan. Church! Go and do likewise!
 - Acts 2:42-27
42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

[Italics and underlining to emphasize that the early church was not ignorant of social developmental ministries]

5. The challenge (An opportunity never to be missed)

Prevention

- Awaken awareness that it is the church's responsibility
- The church should be a resource base
- The human resources in the church should be utilized

Education and Training

- The church should provide the model to be followed
- Teach Biblical Standards
- Teach personal sexual purity
- Train all Church leadership
- Areas of involvement
 - Schools/Universities; Prisons; Work places; Civic Centres, Armed forces/military camps; Villages/rural areas; Professional people; Difficult target groups
- Challenge stereo-types
 - Welcome infected people; Bring HIV positive people to church; Identify with them

Care Giving

- Care needed to affected and infected
 - Counselling, material help, bereavement assistance, orphanages, etc.
- Target financial resources
 - Explore NGO status
- Provide condoms to HIV infected couples
- Utilise church buildings

5. Conclusion

- With HIV/AIDS at the doorstep of all humanity, the church must get actively involved
- The church is challenged to offer greater hope than ever before
- There are reasons to believe that the war against AIDS can be won
 - The Kenya National HIV/AIDS strategic plan 2000-2003 identifies faith-based organizations as critical partners in the fight against HIV/AIDS (decrease of the AIDS rate from 14% in 2000 to 10.2% in 2002)
 - Uganda reported between 1992 and 2000 a decrease by an astounding 50%

The church should therefore remember that there's no government or system that is going to be able to adequately supply the people-resources and finances needed for the AIDS crises in the third world. 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!!!