



AIDS Link

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Good Samaritans

The story of the Good Samaritan, in the Gospel of St. Luke (10:25-37), was told by Jesus to teach that all people should be treated with compassion. It is the story of a man who was robbed, beaten, and left to die by the side of a road. Three people, all from different social groups to the beaten man, passed along the road.



The first two ignored the man, but the third, a Samaritan, felt compassion and took care of him. Jesus teaches us that we should do the same and not discriminate against people we see as being different to ourselves. He reminds us that we should 'love your neighbor as yourself', and explains that anyone who needs love and help is our neighbor.

People suffering from illnesses, such as HIV/AIDS, are often particularly in need of love and help, and so the Bible calls for Christians to come to their aid. The Church, as an incredibly influential community institution, has also been called upon by society to play a meaningful role in reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS and in caring for infected and affected persons.

For many years after the first case of HIV was reported in Belize in 1986, there was very little response from churches in terms of meeting the many needs of persons vulnerable to HIV

infection or those living with the disease. However, many churches have gradually come to realize the vital role they can play in the country's response to HIV/AIDS. More and more churches are awakening to the reality of the situation and answering this call for their compassion

and involvement by helping their members address the disease. Despite this, there is still a long way to go, so this issue of *AIDS Link* spreads the news about what is currently being done by religious groups and looks into their viewpoints on the role of the Church.

Life with HIV/AIDS

God gives me strength

"I found out I had HIV four years ago. At first it was very hard. When I told my family and friends they rejected me. I wanted to keep to myself and push everyone away but I learned to get over it and be myself, and people like me for who I am. Everybody makes mistakes, and I made a mistake. People with HIV shouldn't be ashamed.

"I cried for many days and I asked myself, 'why?' Now I'm a Christian, and I understand that it took this for God to get my attention. I learned not to worry about what people think, only what God thinks, and that encourages me to go out and administer to people. My heart's desire is to help others so they don't go through what I went through.

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Discussion Topic

Do churches send out mixed messages?

Views collected from religious leaders suggest many faith-based groups are progressing beyond the culture of silence and stigma that frequently surrounds HIV/AIDS. Some speak with excitement about how the Church can use its central position in society to impact the spread of the disease. Others quote the Bible's teachings on having a non-judgmental approach when caring for those infected or affected by illness.

How this is translated in reality can be seen from what is actually being done, as described in *AIDS Link's* news sections, and from hearing of the experiences of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA). It is here that we discover true compassion, but also cases of encouraging words standing alone without the actions to back them up, and even outright discrimination of PLWHA. The quotes on these discussion pages are a small selection from interviews conducted over a month and do not necessarily represent the views of entire religious groups.

"To the extent that you have done it unto the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

St. Matthew (25:40)

What is the role of the Church?

There is widespread agreement that the Church has the potential to play a major role. The work of many churches is often at an individual level rather than as part of a nationally organized program, so it might be largely unrecognized by society. Some churches teach in sermons about abstinence, stigma, discrimination, and compassion. They often offer counseling, care, and assistance with food and basic necessities, or give advice on referrals. Churches that have youth groups are able to use them to discuss the risks of HIV/AIDS and the benefits of positive lifestyle values. In contrast, other churches have stated that they do not perceive HIV/AIDS as a problem in their districts, and feel no need to act.

A person living with HIV/AIDS

"I would like to see the churches take consciousness that any person could become infected, even the faithful who have unfaithful partners; become more involved in sharing information related to HIV transmission with members of the Church; become the place where PLWHA can find comfort and acceptance, regardless of how they have become infected; and advocate for no discrimination by believers."

Mr. Patrick Andrews, Youth With a Mission

"This is one of the greatest opportunities in the 21st century for the Church to put its words into action and live out its beliefs. In our view the Church
2 is commanded to get involved and reach out,

demonstrating care and kindness. I believe the Church has the answer if we step up to the plate, but we're not presently batting. We're feeling like it's someone else's responsibility."

Bishop Philip Wright, Anglican Church



"We have this wonderful opportunity to have a tremendous impact. The Church's involvement should range from keeping people informed and helping them to make positive decisions, to the Church never leaving to others the caring of people who need to be loved and to feel God's presence."

Ambassador Balderamos, National AIDS Commission

"There are many faith-based organizations who have internalized the challenge of HIV/AIDS to make it an important part of what they do, and there are many who have not. Both prevention, and care and treatment will only be complete when the faith-based communities are involved."

Pastor Joseph, Cotton Tree Nazarene Church

"AIDS is closing in. Why do we have to wait to do the right thing? I see the Church as playing a pivotal role because it's the hub of society. We've been hiding it for too long. I would like us to embrace a role where a PLWHA speaks to a group with a pastor standing beside him."

Discussion Topic

Is judgment an issue?

Countless PLWHA who are in need of support do not turn to their church. It appears that judgment of PLWHA is still common, despite the teachings of the Bible. Although many religious leaders preach and practice compassion to all, others still appear to be struggling to come to terms with the idea:

Rev. Elridge Brooks, Church of the Nazarene, Punta Gorda

“You can’t have compassion but not have compassion about HIV/AIDS.”



Mr. Dominguez, Adventist Church, Dangriga

“If a person turns their back on a PLWHA they should think again because I don’t think they know God. A child of God should not think that way.”

A person living with HIV/AIDS

“Churches need not to lose their mission call of love to humanity, especially at this time in Belize when the rate of infection is growing.”

Pastor Nadir Ruiz, Adventist Church, Punta Gorda

“Jesus still loves you even if he hates the sin, but these are the consequences we face if we do not do what Christ has asked us to do. Christ died for that individual too. Christ will forgive. We need to forgive also if we are Christians.”



A pastor

“Some pastors think they’d be openly encouraging evil if they let an HIV positive person remain in their congregation. People who say HIV only happens to bad people may well know how it is transmitted but still say that evil has been a cause of that and so they want nothing to do with it. The Bible is so broad-based, each one can find support for their views.”

Rev. John Peeters, Catholic Mission Council, Corozal

“The question is ‘why do they have it?’ and whether people have been doing certain things. I have to fight against the feeling that they deserve it. If you go out and you do dangerous things and you suffer for it, then whose fault is that? The Catholic Church’s stand is that it’s up to God to do the judging. We believe there’s sin in the world. We’re all sinners to different degrees. We try to deal with the person, not their sin. Yes, we love the person, but we do not love the way they live.”

Mr. Richard Smith, My Refuge Christian Ministries

“I see a lot of judgment of PLWHA. When I come across judgment I say, ‘Think about it. How would you feel if you were treated like that?’ A lot of people won’t come to My Refuge because they say AIDS is there. We never treat PLWHA as outsiders. They eat at my table with me. They need to feel loved.”

“He that is without sin amongst you, let him cast the first stone.”

St. John (8:7)

ABC: Abstain, Be faithful, Condomize

Christian and Muslim religions teach abstinence until marriage and then being faithful. When it comes to the question of condom use, conflicting interpretations of holy writings combine with personal thoughts on the reality of HIV/AIDS to give a confusing mixture of messages.

According to the Pope’s interpretation of the Bible, the use of condoms is not acceptable under any circumstances. In contrast, other Christians and Muslims accept the use of condoms (and other contraceptives) within marriage to help protect against unwanted pregnancies or the transmission of diseases. Despite this, the great

majority of religious leaders interviewed do not teach young people about condoms (and many also do not want condom use to be discussed in detail in schools) as they feel this would encourage them to have sexual relationships outside of marriage, committing a sin against God.

Rev. Leo Palmer, La Immaculada Catholic Parish, Orange Walk

“Our church teaches the teachings of Jesus Christ on sexual relationships, marriage, and so on. Contraception is evil. The end does not justify the means. Abstinence is the only 100% solution.”

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Discussion Topic

Continued from Page 3

Rev. John Peeters, Catholic Mission Council, Corozal

“The argument against condoms and other forms of artificial contraception comes from the fact that human beings are to do only natural things. There is debate on this within the Catholic Church and I believe there are many Catholics who are not really convinced on this point.”

Bishop Philip Wright, Anglican Church

“I wouldn’t say the Church should never mention condom use, but it’s a question of where you place your emphasis. With the Church the emphasis ought to be on abstinence and being faithful. Our church permits condom use in committed relationships if one partner has HIV. Outside of that we would not rush to it, but it’s not ruled out... Throwing condoms into a crowd is an irresponsible way to go, but if condom distribution is coupled with counseling and proper information that’s a different matter.”

Rev. Arsenio Salas, Church of God, Punta Gorda

“The Church should have a role in educating people about HIV/AIDS. In church sometimes pastors seem afraid to talk about these things but if we have to use condoms to save this generation, it’s our responsibility.”

Mr. John George, Youth With a Mission

“What we focus on is ABC, but we change our C to ‘change your behavior and lifestyle’ because we take it from a biblical perspective so instead of condoms there needs to be a lifestyle change for an individual. It’s important to have the right morals, principles, values, and discipline.”

Ms. Kimberley Gillet, Muslim Community Primary School teacher, Belize City

“It’s best if you equip students with all the knowledge they need so they can make the right decisions. They will ask about condoms so it’s best if you tell them or they go somewhere else and might be misinformed.”

Superintendent William Faux, Methodist Church, Punta Gorda

“Students should know everything about HIV/AIDS. It has to begin at a primary level because a lot of primary school students are sexually active. If we hide things

from them, they are in more danger. Within the Church there is quarreling because presenting condom use as an alternative to abstinence might lead to more promiscuity, but we have to face the facts.”



Those interviewed often brought up concerns about the type of information being distributed about condoms, so health educators were asked to respond. Many Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) centers and Belize Family Life Association (BFLA) sites, to which people go for advice on HIV/AIDS, report that religion has rarely, if ever, been a problem with their clients considering using condoms. Some staff wonder if people know their church’s stand on their use, as condoms are not mentioned in church. Health educators understand and respect the views of the churches but believe they have a job to do to save as many sexually active people as possible.

One nonprofit HIV/AIDS organization informs us that “with adolescents we say abstinence is the safest way to prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, and we talk about being mutually faithful. If you choose to have sex the next best thing is using a condom. Our educators tell people condoms are 70 – 97% effective, depending on how and where you keep them and how you use them.”

The organization also states that “there needs to be more dialoging between us and church groups. I don’t expect churches to be handing out condoms, but I’d like to see more sermons on discrimination, gender, and sexuality. I’m sure pastors see discrimination, and they are in a position to stop it. Their role should be to support mechanisms, for example if you don’t want young girls to have sex for schoolbooks then find alternatives and get financing for these girls.”



Signs of change in the Vatican

In 2006 and early 2007, there were suggestions in the world press that a shift from the Vatican's policy of a complete ban on condom use might soon occur. Several prominent cardinals (from countries such as Italy, Belgium, France, England, and Switzerland) and theologians have called for a change in Catholic teaching. They say the Church should allow the use of condoms by married couples where one partner is infected by HIV. They see this use of condoms as protection against a deadly disease as the lesser of two evils, and



Pope Benedict XVI

believe it is morally different to using condoms for birth control.

Organizations (including the United Nations and the World Health Organization), campaigners, and scientists worldwide have long been pressing for a change in the current policy, which they believe obstructs attempts to save millions of lives. A Vatican department has recently produced a report discussing the matter, but a new policy has not yet been issued by the Pope.

Sources: Articles from the BBC News, The National Catholic Reporter, and the Guardian websites



Nationwide HIV/AIDS News

'Empowerment for All' school program

The Anglican Church, supported by the Episcopal Relief and Development Organization in New York, has been running an eight-week school project, 'Empowerment for All'. This HIV/AIDS awareness program is being piloted in seven primary schools and one high school. Feedback has been very positive and so a new proposal has been submitted to expand the program to every Anglican school. Each class will have an AIDS corner and discuss the issues involved in the HIV/AIDS situation in Belize. Bishop Wright has stated, "At this stage it is largely an Anglican Church initiative but certainly down the road we'd be more than happy to share the materials we've been using with other schools. We are looking into ways to bring other denominations on board."

HIV/AIDS services for immigrants

The Meso-America project exists in all Central American countries, to improve access for immigrants to services for HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Belize's pilot project is due to begin in Stann Creek on 30th April, supported by the Global Fund. Agencies working on the project include the Ministry of Health (MoH), Belize Family Life Association (BFLA), Pan American Social Marketing Organization (PASMO), POWA Fu Women, and the National Health Institute (NHI). Outreach, prevention activities, STI tests, voluntary counseling and testing, and antiretroviral medication will be available for mobile populations in

Stann Creek. Training of key people has begun and testing and outreach will begin in early May. The project is expected to expand next year to other entry points into Belize, in Cayo and Corozal.

Progress on dealing with resistance to HIV medication

In response to evidence that a small number of children are showing resistance to first line antiretroviral (ARV) medication and to prepare for future cases, the Ministry of Health (MoH) is working toward testing viral loads and procuring second line medication for ten children.

Viral load testing helps document the need for second line medication and is of paramount importance in the overall clinical management of patients. Resistance to first line medication (and therefore a need for second line medication) is shown by a viral load test finding a higher amount of the virus in a person's blood than would be expected if they were responding to first line ARVs. Six samples for those patients anticipated to need second line medication have already been sent to Trinidad free of cost.

MoH is in the process of 'borrowing' second line medication from the Bahamas through the Pan American Health Organization's local office. It is hoped that this will allow enough time for MoH to secure a long-term supply.

Nationwide HIV/AIDS News

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NAC concerned over Amandala article

The National AIDS Commission (NAC) is greatly concerned over an article written by Mr. Stephen Okeke and published in the 15th April issue of the Amandala. NAC has stated that comments made in the article, entitled 'Medical and Economic Consequences of What Homosexuals Do', have a negative impact on their work and the national response to HIV/AIDS.

In a statement to the media, NAC said they are dismayed at Mr. Okeke's statement that 'those who treat AIDS patients are at great risk not only from HIV infection, but also from new strains of other diseases' and that 'those who are housed with AIDS patients are also at risk'. In fact HIV is only transmitted through blood exchange and unprotected sexual contact, as well as from an HIV positive mother to her child (during childbirth and breastfeeding). Those who care for or provide shelter for PLWHA are not at great risk. In clinical settings universal precautions are taken which effectively prevent transmission of HIV and any other such diseases.

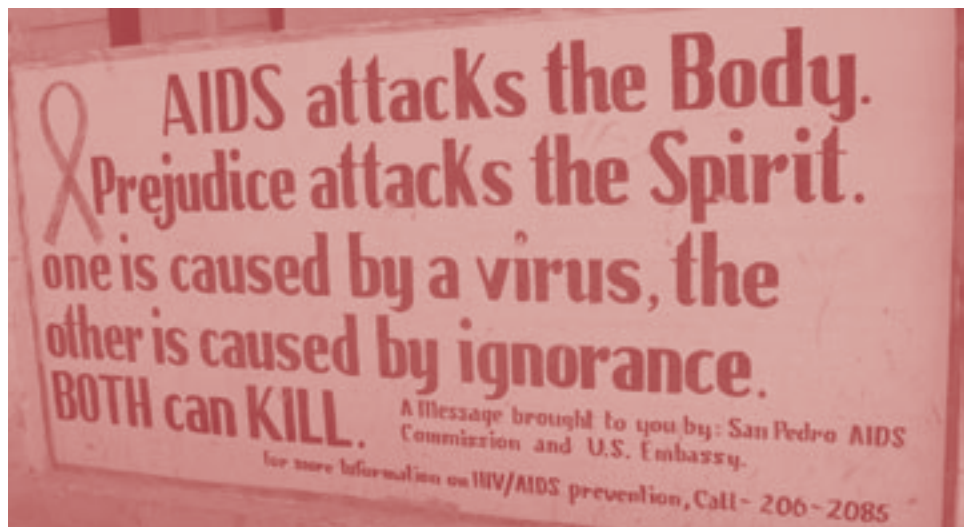
NAC says, "Statements such as these repeat misinformation and cause unnecessary fear among healthcare workers and families who are providing support and treatment for persons living with HIV and AIDS. Such statements can also cause unfounded apprehension among the population as a whole...."

"We must also respond to dispel the perpetuation of the myth that HIV/AIDS is a 'gay' disease that 'starts from gays and stops with gays'..." In reality, heterosexual transmission accounts for 85% of all HIV infections.

In addition, NAC rejects Mr. Okeke's statement that there is no urgency to stop the spread of AIDS. NAC condemns the article and exposes it as being directly contrary to Belize's National HIV/AIDS Policy. NAC calls on all national partners and all organizations and individuals to assist in efforts that will ultimately

6 lead to success in fighting HIV/AIDS.

They also call on the media to provide the forum for promoting informed and responsible dialogue on these key issues. NAC had been told by the editor of the Amandala that their statement would be published, but this is yet to happen.



A new lease of life for AIDS Committees

The National AIDS Commission (NAC) has held meetings countrywide to reactivate and organize district AIDS Committees. Most committees are working on a one-year proposal, consisting of two or three goals. Funds to carry out activities are being mobilized by NAC in conjunction with the Social Investment Fund (SIF). In response to requests from the committees, NAC plans to hold two one-day conference and training sessions to cover the members of all committees, to standardize training across the districts. This will provide a refresher for old members and an introduction for new members to the HIV/AIDS situation and the role that committees can play.

Correction

In the last issue of *AIDS Link*, the website for The United Belize Advocacy Movement (UNIBAM) was given incorrectly. They also now have a second website, so you can find out more at www.unibam.org and www.qbz.4t.com.



News from Toledo District

Toledo United Pastors' Fellowship

The Fellowship was established about two years ago, and it has around 12 members. They know of five families affected by HIV/AIDS, and have given them help, but currently they have no more resources for this. The Fellowship has donated to Caring for Children in the past and hopes to return to this in the near future. Beyond this, it does not have a collective approach to HIV/AIDS, but each church acts individually upon what it believes to be an appropriate level of response to the disease. For example, Rev. Brooks from the

Church of the Nazarene described how they preach about abstinence and the reduction of stigma and discrimination, discuss issues such as family planning with their men's group, donate food to people in need, including PLWHA, and visit hospitals.

Toledo AIDS Committee

The Committee has been reactivated, and now has many new members. Three themes will be focused on over 2007, the first of which is 'youth'.



News from Orange Walk District

Anglican School 8-week program

St Peter's Anglican School has been a pilot school for an eight-week HIV/sexuality program. *AIDS Link* visited to see the students in action. The program works on many levels. It aims to promote abstinence as the major preventative measure for HIV, to increase students' knowledge and translate this into behavior change, to promote healthy decision making for the avoidance of high risk behaviors, and build empathy for PLWHA. It also aims to support teachers through topics that many can find uncomfortable to teach. Other objectives are to create awareness of HIV/AIDS among parents and to educate them about sexual reproductive health,

and to generate interest in the HIV/AIDS situation in the community. Each upper standard classroom has an HIV/AIDS corner containing posters, information resources, and the students' portfolios of work.

Orange Walk AIDS Committee

The newly revitalized committee now has around 25 members, who have been meeting frequently since February and have formed an action plan. Their main initial goal is for capacity building with members. They are expecting to run six months of training sessions for members, on HIV 101, stigma and discrimination, gender and HIV, risk assessment for HIV, and the social and economic impact of HIV. From May they will start having sessions with high school teachers to give them this information, and the hope is that teachers will then pass the information on to students. Members also plan to go into schools and assist teachers with HIV/AIDS education. The committee's email address is owhac@yahoo.com.



Students learn how to deal with peer pressure

Increase in testing

The VCT center has reported that 688 HIV tests were conducted in 2006 (29 of which were positive). Already this year, in January and February alone, 340 tests (around half the total for last year) have been conducted (with just one positive result). The VCT center has been relocated within the hospital compound.



News from Stann Creek District

Stann Creek Pastors' Association

The Association has 10 to 12 members, representing the main denominations. A representative has stated that he does not believe they have any concrete programs specifically for PLWHA, but that "we have made a commitment to do whatever we can. Because of confidentiality we often don't know who to help, but we encourage people to refer PLWHA to us". Some pastors have been to HIV/AIDS workshops, some preach about the moral aspects of the disease, and some visit people who are ill in hospital or in their own home. The Association has also offered support to the Caring for Children program for orphans and vulnerable children and their families affected by HIV/AIDS.

POWA Fu Women

POWA has recently produced a music CD about uniting against violence and HIV/AIDS. This has been so enthusiastically received that they have made more copies as part of a fundraising effort. The CD features contributions from Supa G, Junie Mar, and the mayor of Dangriga. POWA's youth reporter program is producing a colorful newsletter full of news and photographs of issues of importance to the community. To receive printed or electronic copies of the newsletter or to buy the CD, contact POWA at the Women's Department.

Dangriga HIV/AIDS Society

The society is in the process of reviewing its structures. Changes will be published in the July/August issue.



News from Cayo District

Youth With A Mission (YWAM)

As a Christian organization, YWAM (Roaring Creek, 802-2677) encourages churches to become involved and to provide finances for HIV/AIDS work. They network with churches and explain the need for their support. They plan to send letters to churches asking them to sponsor interventions such as advertisements or billboards. They are also working on a curriculum about the HIV/AIDS situation, with information on why HIV is increasing and the steps that need to be taken to reduce its spread. The choices that children need to make are explained and their value system is defined. The aim is that this curriculum will be worked into the school system to develop a generation that has right values and morals.

My Refuge Christian Ministries

My Refuge is located in Roaring Creek and is headed by Mr. Richard Smith. They offer a variety of services, including help for PLWHA. They are able to provide HIV/AIDS counseling and can sometimes help with direct assistance. As part of this, a free HIV/AIDS counseling hotline has recently been set up, at 0800 HIV HOPE. The organization intends to make increased use of opportunities provided by their radio station for raising awareness of HIV/AIDS. They also have a support group of around 12 PLWHA in prison, who meet weekly for Bible studies.

Belmopan AIDS Committee

Committee members attended a health fair in April at St. Matthews where HIV testing took place and fliers were distributed. They have also conducted outreach work in villages with a Rotaract group from Northwestern University, Illinois. The outreach consisted of helping schools in Belmopan to produce skits on health issues and painting the health center in Frank's Eddys village. They have painted a mural on the wall of the Belmopan soccer field about the importance of being tested for HIV and are looking for more students to put painted handprints around the message. They also continue to provide PLWHA with food and assistance with hospital visits. Correction: The chair of the committee is Mr. Mike Martinez, and not Mr. Mike Mendez, as was printed in issue 3.

Cornerstone Foundation

The Cornerstone Foundation is continuing with HIV/AIDS outreach work, with recent activities including a presentation for parents at the San Ignacio preschool, one for the Belize Defence Force, and one for standard six students at St. Andrews school. Counseling for PLWHA is on offer from Ms. Anna Silva, and also from an experienced HIV/AIDS counselor, Ms. Saskia Speiss, who is volunteering with Cornerstone until mid-June 2007. Call 824-2373 for details.

Who's Who

COMFORTH: A faith-based response to HIV/AIDS

COMFORTH is a committee for a faith-based response to HIV and AIDS. It was founded in 2002 by the Belize Council of Churches, with technical assistance and financial support provided through UNICEF. COMFORTH is chaired by Bishop Philip Wright of the Anglican Church and aims to help turn the beneficial role that many churches wish to play in the fight against HIV/AIDS into reality. As explained by COMFORTH's coordinator, Ms. Myrna Manzanares, "We are all in this together, so we can share ideas, information, and training".



Myrna Manzanares

COMFORTH's main achievements have been the production of the pastoral care manual (which is due to be translated into Spanish this year) and holding training sessions. The training, assisted by various churches and the Ministry of Health, includes Clinical Management of HIV, Pastoral Counseling, Referral Services, Community Outreach, and Faith Community Action Plan Development. Virtues training is covered by members of the Baha'i Faith to promote attitude and behavior change through an understanding of people's spiritual nature. Trainings have been held in Belize District (urban and rural), Dangriga, and Punta Gorda, and more are planned this year for Cayo, Orange Walk and Corozal.



COMFORTH believes the Church has a pivotal role to play in combating HIV/AIDS, at the forefront in prevention, promotion of positive lifestyle changes, education, spiritual care, and support. They work within the following four areas:

1. Advocacy - COMFORTH advocates for services on behalf of PLWHA and their families and uses the church platform to promote behavior change and to reduce stigma and discrimination against PLWHA.

2. Education and training - COMFORTH provides current information to the church community, especially its leaders. Training is based on their pastoral care manual and strengthens the skills and knowledge of church leaders so that they can educate the church community about HIV/AIDS and support people infected and affected by the disease.

3. Pastoral counseling – The Church provides direct support and counseling to PLWHA.

4. Networking – A database will soon be created which will keep the committee informed about trained persons, strengthen links with other organizations, inform them of PLWHA's needs, and arrange referrals.

Active members of COMFORTH, who have assisted with training sessions, include the Anglican, Methodist, Adventist, Central Assembly of God, and Lake Independence Baptist churches and the Baha'i Faith. The Church of the Nazarene and Zoe Ministries are also members, and representatives from all these churches, as well as from the Catholic Church have undergone the training, along with other interested individuals.

If churches are willing to recognize the potential of COMFORTH and to participate fully in its plans, this faith-based contribution to the national response to HIV/AIDS has the potential to help lower the incidence of HIV, reduce stigma and discrimination, and increase the quality of life of people infected or affected by HIV/AIDS.

To find out more about training sessions for church leaders or youth groups, or for other support and resources, contact Ms. Manzanares at mynamanzanares@yahoo.com, or call COMFORTH's office at the Lake Independence Baptist Church, on 203-5551 or 603-5721.



"Be strong and take heart all you who hope in the Lord."

- Psalm 31:24

Living With HIV/AIDS

The basics of home care

One of the best places for people with AIDS to be cared for is in their own home surrounded by people who accept and love them. Being somewhere familiar can make the person feel more comfortable and less stressed. It can give them more control over their life and a more positive outlook. People with AIDS-related illnesses often get better faster when they are at home and helped by friends and loved ones.

Supporting someone with HIV/AIDS can be very rewarding but also very demanding. Each person has their own changing needs, and reacts to the illness in their own way, according to their personality, background, education, financial circumstances, and religious and cultural beliefs. By keeping certain thoughts in mind, a dedicated caregiver can provide the necessary social and emotional support as well as medical and physical help, as a person with AIDS goes back and forth between periods of wellness and illness.



Initial thoughts

As a caregiver it is important to be educated about the disease, to take care not to show rejection or discrimination, and to maintain the dignity and respect of the person. An ideal caregiver is dependable, punctual, approachable, and compassionate. You should address the person politely, explain any procedures you need to carry out, listen carefully to what they say, and always be truthful in what you say. Provide adequate privacy, whether this means leaving the room when the person is using a bedpan or covering their body

10 appropriately during baths.

It is essential to maintain confidentiality and avoid gossiping about the person's condition. Mutual trust between the person with AIDS and the caregiver is an important part of their relationship and must not be violated. Without confidentiality there can be serious consequences for people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), such as stigmatization, isolation, or the loss of their job or house.

Social support

Many people do not know much about HIV/AIDS and they are afraid of the virus and those who are infected with it. This means that having HIV is very isolating. Having people around who are caring and who understand why they do not need to fear catching the disease will greatly improve a PLWHA's quality of life.

If the person's family is aware of their status, you might be able to answer questions they have about dealing with HIV/AIDS, and help them to solve any conflicts, support each other, and find sources of help from the community or HIV/AIDS organizations. You could also find out if there are support groups in the area that they might like to join.

Emotional support

PLWHA go through phases of emotions, including denial, anger, fear, depression, and acceptance, which you should be aware of and allow them to express. Finding out you have HIV/AIDS can lead to a variety of concerns and fears, such as the risk of infection to others, how friends and family will react when they find out, whether you'll be able to keep your job, what your body will go through, losing privacy and independence, what will happen to your children when you become ill, being abandoned and left alone in pain, and so on. These feelings may become so strong that a person feels they cannot carry on with their day-to-day life. Someone caring for a person in this situation will need to work with them to find ways to cope with these feelings.

On the other hand, other people find that knowing they have a fatal illness gives them courage to focus on what is important to them, they feel a new sense of purpose, and decide to make the most of the time left to them. They may become active in fighting the epidemic, advocating for better services, providing counseling for other PLWHA, or talking about HIV/AIDS in schools.

Living With HIV/AIDS

Remember that every person is unique. Reassure the person that needing help is normal, and help them find a balance between dependence and independence.

Keeping each other safe

Some people are afraid to get close to PLWHA, but with a few precautions it is possible to care for PLWHA safely at home. Remember that HIV is NOT spread by touch, by sharing food, or sharing household items.

The real risk with home care is actually for people with HIV. Because their immune system has been weakened, they can easily catch diseases, such as colds or the flu, from other people in the house. Also, the effects of diseases are much more severe or even life threatening.



U n i v e r s a l precautions should be used at all times, based on the assumption that all body fluids can carry HIV and other blood-borne

diseases:

- Cover any cuts in the skin or open sores with a plastic bandage.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after contact with blood or other body fluids, after going to the bathroom, and before preparing or eating food.
- Clean up spills of blood and other body fluids using a fresh mixture of 1 part household bleach to 9 parts water and wear latex gloves. Paper towels should be used and disposed of in a plastic garbage bag.
- Gloves (or small plastic bags if no gloves are available) should be worn once and then disposed of in a plastic garbage bag, but remember that the skin is an excellent barrier to HIV as long as there are no cuts or sores.



- Soiled clothes should be stored in sealed plastic bags and then washed in hot, soapy water, separately from other clothing.
- Dispose of materials soiled with body fluids in a sealed plastic bag. Use caution when disposing of waste that may contain infected materials or used needles.

Medical support

Check if it is alright with the person whom you are caring for before you contact their doctor. If they agree to this, the home caregiver should get regular updates from the person's doctor or nurse on what kind of care and medication is needed, and what changes in the person's health they should look out for.

Physical support

Often there is a greater need for basic tasks and actions than for medical care. For example, there are many simple things that will help a person live more happily and healthily in their own home. Good nutrition, multivitamins and safe drinking water are essential. Rooms in the home should be clean, and should have plenty of light and air. Help can be given with chores such as shopping, washing, looking after the house, and caring for children.

In the later stages of AIDS the person will be weak, and may need help with tasks such as brushing their teeth, washing, or eating and drinking. Be aware that the person may just need to be touched, talked to, listened to, loved, encouraged, and respected as a human being.

Sources: 'HIV, Health, and your Community: A Guide for Action' R. Granich and J. Mermin (2006), The Hesperian Foundation (www.hesperian.org); 'Faith-based Manual for the Response to HIV and AIDS: Empowerment and Support for Families' M. Manzanares (2006), UNICEF; and 'Home and Community Care; Living Positively with HIV/AIDS' (2001), CAREC/PAHO/WHO.

God gives me strength

Continued from Page 1

“I’ve lost everything but God. It’s hard with no job because I didn’t finish high school. I never had no family encouraging me, but my friends from church give me hope. Since I joined the church my body feels better. I feel in my heart that I’m not sick. God gives me strength to go out and face people. He helps me a lot every day.

“At churches they don’t specifically preach about HIV/AIDS. I think it can be helpful for them to talk about discrimination though. I guess that’s why a lot of people with HIV/AIDS don’t come out, because the church doesn’t talk about it. When they discriminate

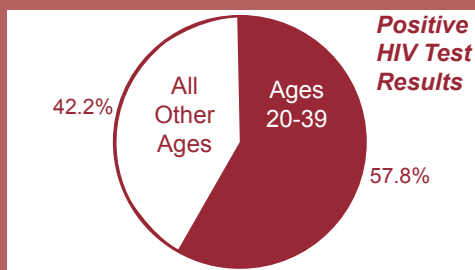
against you, it does a lot of damage. It’s killing a lot of people. I’ve had a lot of discrimination from my family and friends and sometimes from people in church, so I like to keep myself to myself.

“I used to go to schools and talk about HIV, but not recently because things have been really tough. I believe if young people are sexually active they should know about condoms. People don’t have to go the same way as me because they can practice safe sex. When I’d talk about condoms, I’d say they’re not 100% safe. People need to check up on themselves and their partner to see if they have HIV. I don’t know why churches say you shouldn’t use condoms. You should because that’s what protects you. But to abstain, that’s the best thing.”

Belize 2006 HIV/AIDS Statistics

Source: Ministry of Health

Yearly Totals	2006	2005
New HIV infections reported	443	434
New AIDS cases reported	43	30
AIDS-related deaths reported	73	76



Totals from 1986 to December 2006	
HIV infections recorded	3,805
AIDS cases recorded	805
AIDS-related deaths recorded	701

33% (about one third) of people testing positive at Central Medical Laboratory in 2006 were in the 20-29 age group, and 57.8 (well over half) of people testing positive were in the 20-39 age group.

Poetry competition winner

Written by Xanker, Standard 5, Faith Nazarene, San Ignacio

You are nobody,
in life AIDS is the man’s eye,
for it is in life.

If you are a child
please hug me, life is here now,
for it is the life.

Fear is in my heart,
fever is on my body, soul,
for it is my life.

AIDS Link

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