GUIDELINES FOR WORLD AIDS DAY SERVICE OF WORSHIP SUNDAY 30 NOVEMBER 2008 OR SUNDAY 7 DECEMBER 2008

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Please note: These guidelines do not form a full service but are merely to serve in assisting in the planning thereof.

More information on HIV and Aids is available at CABSA (the Christian Aids Bureau) by either visiting the website at www.cabsa.co.za or phoning the office on (021) 873 0028 or directing an e-mail to management@cabsa.co.za.

1. Background for World Aids Day 2008

The international Red Cross (IFRC) recently stated that the HIV pandemic is a disaster. "The AIDS epidemic is a disaster on many levels" ... "The bottom line is that our response to HIV is failing to keep pace with the complexity of what is still an evolving disaster, and we are still struggling to respond effectively," ... "It's a disaster which never stops. The magnitude of it makes it a disaster." In a time when one of the greatest human disasters is taking place around us, it is our Biblical calling to live and serve as representatives of Christ.

World Aids Day came into being in 1988. Wikipedia states that “The concept of a World Aids Day originated at the 1988 World Summit of Ministers of Health on Programmes for Aids Prevention. Since then, it has been taken up by governments, international organizations and charities around the world”. Since 1988 the day has grown into an international event used in many countries worldwide to make people aware of HIV and Aids.

The Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance promotes participation in this day with the theme: “Stop Aids! Keep the promise!” This year the focus is to fall specifically on the importance of leadership. For more information on this visit the website http://www.worldaidscampaign.org/.

At events such as Confirmation and Christening Christians promise to take care of one another and to strive to live according to God’s Word. “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ”, the apostle Paul calls upon us in Galatians 6:2. The responsible and important roles to be played by leaders on congregation level and wider are spelled out in many places in the Scriptures. Congregations can therefore use the time around 1 December to focus on the meaning of these truths within the context of the HIV pandemic.
2. **Tips in preparation of the sermon relating to World Aids Day**

It is recommended that members of the congregation should be involved in the service in many ways, such as:

- Children and/or the youth could make posters beforehand, directing churchgoers’ attention to the reality and extent of the HIV pandemic. However, it is important to give guidance in order to prevent the “proclaiming” of insensitive language or untruths in this way. A good idea is to use relevant Scripture verses such as Mat 25:37, 25:40, 1 Cor 12:26 and Gal 6:2. Put these posters in strategic places so that churchgoers would be able to see them clearly before and/or during the service.

- A ward or cell group could take the responsibility of creating an appropriate atmosphere in church with flowers and candles.

- A congregation group could make red Aids ribbons beforehand to pin on each churchgoer before the service.

- Should it be decided to use the “stone ceremony” (see point 4 below), each churchgoer could be given a stone before the service to keep with them till the start of the ceremony.

- Make timeous arrangements with people who will be participating in the various elements, such as the lighting of candles, reading from the Scripture, etc.

- Take special care to ensure that people who will be given an opportunity to say a few words, are fully aware of the importance of correct and sensitive language, e.g.: someone who lives with HIV, is not “infected”, is not a “victim”, is not a “great sinner”, is not “an unbeliever or heathen”. We do not say such a person “has Aids” or is an “Aids sufferer” – always refer to “people living with HIV”.

3. **LIGHTING OF CANDLE**

[Arrange beforehand that someone will come forward to light the candle or invite a volunteer from those present to come forward. The symbolism of the candle will be strengthened if it carries a prominent AIDS ribbon.]

Before the candle is lit it may be pointed out that the symbol of the candle reminds us of the light of Christ that came into our world. The Word of God is also like a light. Christ called his disciples to be the light of the world. Although HIV and AIDS may seem like a dark cloud that brings darkness into the lives of individuals and into communities, the light of Christ will continue to shine even here.

**PRAYER FOR THE LIGHTING OF THE CANDLE**

Dear Jesus,
help me to spread Thy fragrance everywhere I go.
Flood my soul with Thy spirit and love.
Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly
that all my life may only be a radiance of Thine.
Shine through me and be so in me that
every soul I come in contact with may feel Thy presence in my soul.
Let them look up and see no longer me but only Jesus!
Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as you shine,
so to shine as to be a light to others.
Amen

*(Prayer of Mother Theresa and her helpers in Calcutta.)*
4. The reality of HIV and Aids

It is important that the reality of HIV and Aids is highlighted during the service. The emphasis will depend on the congregation’s experience and perception of the Aids pandemic. In cases where the congregation is feeling the impact of the pandemic (funerals, illnesses, families who have lost their parents, etc) there will be less need for focussing on this aspect during the service. However, where congregations know little of this (or are unaware), this moment in the service will be very important to convey the reality of HIV and Aids. There are various ways of bringing the reality of HIV and Aids to the attention of people. Choose one of the following examples:

(1) **Tell the congregation of the following actual situation:**

Betsie is a woman living on the poor side of town. Her husband who had broken the marriage vows repeatedly by having affairs with other women, left her when she tested positively for HIV.

Betsie is living in great poverty in a very small house. She has no means of transport and has to rely on public transport for which she often has no money. Through the clinic she has access to antiretroviral medication, but unfortunately she has to fetch it from the accredited hospital on the other side of town. Due the recent increase in the cost of living Betsie can no longer afford transport to the hospital, with the result that she has missed several dosages of her medication. Her CD 4 count has starting falling and it looks it will be dropping beneath the dreaded count of less than 200!

There is a great truth in the notion that HIV and Aids is an illness of poverty. For poor people the consequences of living with HIV are far more radical than others. The need to attend to poverty and to actually do something about it, is now more relevant than ever. By relieving the need of only one person you can make a difference. In addressing poverty the need of people living with HIV will also be relieved.

(2) **Testimony:** “**This is how HIV and Aids affects me.”**

The testimony of someone living with HIV (or someone directly affected by it) can convey a powerful message. It is however very important to handle the occasion with great sensitivity.

Please keep the following in mind:

- Arrange with the person long in advance. Ensure that there are no misunderstandings regarding an honorarium.
- Ensure that the person is emotionally ready to speak before the service.
- Introduce the person as someone who will relate how his/her life is affected by HIV. Do not introduce the person as being “HIV+” or something similar.
- Do not give various people too short an opportunity to speak. Rather give one person sufficient time.
- Arrange in advance who will thank the person briefly. It is important that the person is assured of everyone present’s sympathy and that something of this will be made visible. Remember: it is asking a lot to share a personal story with a group of people.

(3) **Incorporate statistics**

Information on statistics is available on the webpage [www.cabsa.co.za](http://www.cabsa.co.za) or can be requested from management@cabsa.co.za.
It is recommended that local statistics be added to these general statistics. The local clinics or hospital might be helpful in giving an indication of the incidence of HIV in the local community. However, please be mindful of the fact that statistics can easily be confusing if it is not communicated directly and plainly. It is important that the person communicating the statistics has good insight and that he/she won’t confuse various statistical criteria, for instance “HIV” and “Aids”.

5. **Stone ceremony**

Hand everyone in the congregation a rough stone the size of a cricket ball (like those under the railway lines). You can do this before the service.

Ensure that the Aids candle lighted at the start of the service – and preferably also a cross – can be seen in the lithurgical space in the front of the church. It is a good idea to place it on the floor, especially if circumstances allow it.

- Create silence through an atmosphere of prayer.
- Let everyone feel the stone in his/her hand. Feel its roughness and think of how rough and terrible the pandemic is. Mention factors like pain and physical scars.
- Let everyone weigh the stone in his/her hand and feel its weight.
- Think of the weight of the illness – mention rejection and emotional pain.
- Let everyone think of someone who is carrying such a “stone” every day (in other words, someone living with HIV or who is directly affected by it).
- Call upon the congregation to pray for these people every day.
- Let everyone come forward to place his/her stone at the candle and cross.

Close with a minute of silent prayer.

6. **PRAYER:**

[This can be a spontaneous prayer by the preacher or congregant, or the following prayer can be used.]

Heavenly Father
In this time of HIV and AIDS we call upon your name -
It is so easy to think that we are invincible,
But we have learned that we are vulnerable.
We pray for your fatherly protection and care.

Jesus, our Saviour
In the midst of the AIDS pandemic we pray to you -
We often feel like sheep without a shepherd.
Lead us though this dark valley.
Bring us into your presence
To be restored and saved.

Spirit of God, our comforter
We have been struggling against HIV and AIDS for years –
We now know that we need your wisdom
We pray for your wisdom:
- for our government – for wisdom in every decision
- for all organisations in the AIDS field – to serve with wisdom
- for all medical professionals – give them wisdom to find medical solutions
- for all caregivers – for wisdom in their loving care
- for young people – give them wisdom to act responsibly
- for Christians – for wisdom to be light and salt in this world of ours

We pray for your church, for ourselves – to be involved in the AIDS pandemic with wisdom.

Amen
7. Sermon – 1 Kings 17

Background: The Elijah cycle starts in 1 Kings 17. Elijah appeared from out of nowhere as God’s weather prophet. His name means "My God is the Lord". He came from Tishbe, in Gilead, on the border of the desert. Elijah was of humble descent, living on someone else’s land (1 Kings 17:1).

NOTE: It is important that the context of the congregation is taken into consideration. With this I mean that people with little means should not be excluded from helping others. In fact, God often wishes to use us without us having to give a cent!

Read the text: 1 Kings 17:1-24

Despite his humble status Elijah did not hesitate providing King Ahab with God’s weather forecast. God’s rainfall report was short – there was not be any rain or dew for the next few years (verse 1).

Why the damning judgement?

The King and his people proposed a vote of no confidence in the Lord. After Ahab’s marriage to Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, he worshipped Baal and built a temple and altar for Baal in Samaria. He erected a sacred pole for Asherah … 450 Baal prophets and 400 Asherah prophets were appointed and kept.

Ahab’s curriculum vitae reads as follows:
He provoked the LORD, the God of Israel more times than all of the kings of Israel before him (1 Kings 16:33). Phew!

The weather forecast was nothing other than a declaration of war against Baal, since as god of fertility the Philistines believed him to be present in rain and dew. Now Elijah said Baal would disappear like mist before the sun.

Having given God’s weather forecast to Ahab, Elijah was instructed by God to go the Kerith Ravine to hide from Ahab. There in that wasteland God cared for Elijah in a wonderful way: He used ravens, impure birds to bring Elijah bread and meat and Elijah drank from the brook.

Elijah’s lesson: The God of Israel is indeed Lord of nature: he uses ravens to do things which are against their nature. Here already it is confirmed to Elijah: you can trust the Lord. God is in control. He does not only give life to man, He maintains life, even if that requires extraordinary ways.

In verse 7 we read that the brooke also dried up as result of the drought. And again God sent Elijah: this time to Zarephath, at the heart of Baal worshipping. Here he encountered a heathen widow (the most vulnerable people in the Ancient World) who could provide him with water upon his request but not with bread as her food supply had totally run out. She only had enough flour and oil for a last meal with her son (verse 12). Her situation was critical. She and her son were facing death.

Elijah’s response is that if she would look after him, God would take care of her and her child until the end of the drought (verse 14). And our story continues that it indeed happened this way.

So once again: Like God took care of Elijah in the wilderness through impure ravens, He cared for him through a heathen outsider in Zarephath. Even more: God cared for the woman and her son through Elijah. God used Elijah and the widow to care for one another. God’s power therefore stretches further than something like merely preventing rain. He can
also provide in the most improbable places. In the heart of the wilderness and in the centre of Baal country.

Our text does not end here. In verses 17 – 24 the seemingly incomprehensible happens: the boy becomes ill and die. The woman blames Elijah (verse 18). Then Elijah takes the child to the upper room where he challenges God in all honesty – softly reproaching – to revive the child. He then stretches himself out over the boy three times (verse 21). (Remark: this is also seen with Elisha (2 Kings 4:34–35) and Paul (Acts 20:10). This is not a magical act, but an act of prayer since Elijah is also praying at the same time: … let this boy’s life return to him!
The resurrection of the child leads to the woman declaring her faith: Elijah, you are a prophet of God and his message is true. The events make this heathen woman worship the God of Israel in Baal country. In reaching out to others God can be glorified!

What are we finding here?
God cares. God cares every day. God cares through his children. You and I often land up in situations where we see no solution, there is no way out! I won’t make it! Then we get anxious. But we should always keep in mind: God’s care also extends to those situations that we regard as life-threatening.

There are of course many different events that can make us feel this way. HIV is one of them. Thousands of people in our country are living with HIV. HIV could be experienced as a no-way-out which is not only due to the actual illness itself. People living with HIV often have bad experiences resulting from the way they are being treated by others. The first thing that comes to mind is stigmatisation: how people refer to and treat people who are living with HIV. They are often pushed out of relationships: edged out of their homes, their families, their circle of friends, at work. And unfortunately often at church too.
And before you say this is a pretty strong statement: What will your reaction be if it is announced at the service: We ask that you pray for the following people who are HIV positive?

In this text we learn that God wants to care for them. More so: He uses his children to care for others, to be a blessing to others. God provided to Elijah, but at the same time God used Elijah to provide to the woman who helped him. Elijah and the widow, who both were in need, became caretakers of each other. God does not care in isolation. God’s care for us may not make us selfish. He cares so that we may care for one another.

God wants to use you to make a difference in the lives of people living with HIV. But first of all we must start thinking differently about HIV and Aids. God requires his church to have a mindset that makes it possible for people living with HIV or the family of the HIV positive person, to talk about it freely and openly, and that they be accepted with compassion. God expects of us to, with the love of God, care for people and provide in their emotional and physical needs. To understand their grief and fears and joys. To be there for them. And before you say: There are so many; where can I help? Remember: “You cannot change the whole world, but you can change someone’s world today.”

And remember: God cares. God uses you to care for others.
Amen.

8. Prayer for Love, Hope and Compassion

Leader: O God, Teach us how to love, how to hope, and compassion for Life.
Leader: We pray for healing.
All: We pray that you lay your hands on our mothers, fathers, daughters and sons. We pray that you touch our lives with your presence, your love, and your grace. We pray that you heal our hearts and minds with the gift of Life.

We pray that you heal your church. We pray that you touch our hearts, minds, and souls with your compelling hand of truth. We pray that you heal our fear, our anxiety, and our prejudice that we might live lives of faith, hope, and love to touch our brothers and sisters living with HIV and AIDS or who are directly affected by it.

Leader: We pray for salvation.

All: We pray that you lift us up from the reality of pain, horror, and disease. We pray that you offer the gift of salvation for those who are dying, for those already dead. We pray for the living, that you bless them with Hope in the light of Love.

We pray for doctors, nurses, caregivers, and researchers. We pray that you offer them wisdom, compassion, and faith. We pray that you bless them with an intellect to boldly imagine a world without AIDS, a vision for a new generation of medical care, and an unconditional love for those who need treatment.

Leader: We pray for support.

All: We pray that you will comfort us in our time of need. We pray that you will provide food for the hungry, clothes for the naked, a home for the homeless, and medical treatment for those who cannot afford such a luxury. We pray that you will provide your orphans with good families that will raise them in love.

We pray for our governments, our pharmaceutical companies, our corporations, and our religious communities. We pray that each institution finds it in their hearts and minds to offer monetary support by way of funding, medical treatments, and community-oriented aid.

Leader: We pray for compassion.

All: We pray that you rain compassion on our community. We pray that you instill in the hearts of complacent people an understanding of the mental, physical, social, and emotional needs of people living with HIV and AIDS or those dying with AIDS. We pray compassion on the cold hearts of those who cling to ignorance and indifference. We pray for compassion on those who are compelled to combat the virus. We pray for compassion for the world as we attempt to wage a war against a deadly disease that is killing our brothers and sisters. We pray for compassion for Life itself.

All: O God, Hear our prayer in the Name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen


9. Blessing and departure

Extend the following blessing before the congregation leaves the church as proposed below:

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Rom 15:13)

A member of the congregation comes to the front, takes a burning candle and walks outside through the main exit as a symbolic act, depicting the Light of Christ being taken into the World. The congregation follows.