

November 29, 2011

World AIDS Day is December 1, 2011. This annual commemoration is an opportunity for us to remember the 30 million lives that have been lost to the deadly pandemic over the past three decades, to rededicate our energies in support of those 34 million living with HIV and AIDS today and to work toward building a future without AIDS.

World AIDS Day is an opportunity for each of us to reflect on God's call to lift up the dignity and value of each person. We are called to confront this pandemic -- whose scale has no precedent in human history -- through prayer, by speaking out to eliminate stigma and discrimination against those living with HIV and AIDS, by caring for those afflicted by the virus in our own communities, by advocating for strong government support of lifesaving programs, and by supporting the global effort to alleviate the global systems of poverty within which HIV and AIDS is so endemic.

We write together this year because the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) have embarked upon a new age of full communion by sharing staff for international issues in our Washington, D.C., advocacy offices, acknowledging the common needs of our global church bodies.

Both of our churches have been living with AIDS for more than 30 years. Together we are part of a global family of 150 million Anglicans and Lutherans, most living in developing countries, for whom the virus is an ever-present daily reality. The struggle against HIV and AIDS is our own struggle as churches and, as the pandemic continues into its fourth decade, the urgency in our work is born out of the intimacy with which we know it.

Consider what 30 years have meant to our global family in Christ:

- Thirty million people -- parents, children, spouses, partners, siblings -- have died early and

unnecessary deaths.

- An entire generation of children in sub-Saharan Africa has been orphaned because of the virus; many of these children have themselves been infected by mother-to-child transmission, a transmission which is preventable with basic medical attention.

- In an unjust world with more wealth than ever before, global poverty has contributed to more people dying each day because they are too poor to survive and receive basic assistance from the symptoms of global poverty: gender-based violence, discrimination, hunger and lack of access to medical treatment.

Our churches continue to address the virus and the systems of poverty it permeates. ELCA programs in Tanzania teach students marketable skills alongside HIV and AIDS awareness education. Episcopal-supported programs in Uganda care for AIDS patients while paying school fees for AIDS-orphaned children.

Episcopalians and Lutherans are invested in prevention, treatment, care and support, and alleviating stigma for all living with HIV and AIDS.

- The [National Episcopal AIDS Coalition](#) provides innovative resources and news updates to congregations ministering to those affected by HIV and AIDS.

- The comprehensive [ELCA Strategy on HIV and AIDS](#) highlights a commitment to prevention, treatment, alleviating stigma, and providing care and support for all. It guides and supports congregational responses to our domestic communities and our global companions in need.

Our global community has made significant advancements in tackling this pandemic. Investments in medicine and prevention education have halted transmission in communities around the world. Infection rates continue to decline. The number of people receiving antiretroviral treatment is increasing -- by a factor of 13, just from 2004 to 2009 -- allowing tens of millions of HIV-positive people to lead healthy lives. Hundreds of thousands of babies are prevented from being born with HIV and a comparable number orphaned from the virus receive food, education and assistance from churches and aid workers.

ELCA members and Episcopalians are key leaders in helping to stop the shunning and shaming of those living with HIV, engaging in public acts of repentance for past discrimination, distributing medicines and prevention techniques affordably to all parts of the world, and providing care and support to those living with HIV and AIDS in our own communities.

Today, we must increase these efforts. We stand at the threshold of reaching the goal of achieving an "AIDS-free generation" recently set by Secretary of State Clinton. But whether we are able to reach this milestone will depend on nothing less, and nothing more, than whether our nations and communities are willing to commit the resources and energies to make the next 30 years different from the past 30.

Unfortunately, today we face the danger that our dream of an AIDS-free generation will remain just that -- a dream. U.S. funding for these lifesaving global health programs continues to be targeted for disproportionate cuts. Even fractional cuts to these accounts -- which already represent far less than 1 percent of our federal budget -- would reverse these efforts. Global infection rates would increase and AIDS would claim millions more lives than it does even today.

Through our shared witness in Washington, our churches are working to ensure that our government allocates the highest funding levels possible to address HIV and AIDS, including full funding for the president's Global Health Initiative. The voice of every Episcopalian and every ELCA member is vital to this work, so we urge you to join our churches' advocacy efforts by becoming members of the [Episcopal Public Policy Network](#) or the [ELCA e-Advocacy Network](#).

As Christians, we have just embarked upon the season of Advent, in which we prepare our hearts and minds to receive the One who comes that we "may have life, and have it abundantly." In this season, on this World AIDS Day, may the healing offered by our Incarnate, Crucified, and Resurrected Lord inspire us to cross from 30 years of death and loss to a future of abundant life for all.

In God's grace and healing,

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori

Presiding Bishop Presiding Bishop and Primate

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America The Episcopal Church