




**40 Days of Prayer
for Persons Living With and
Affected by HIV and AIDS**

A United Methodist
Global AIDS Fund resource

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40
DAYS OF
PRAYER
FOR PERSONS
LIVING WITH
AND AFFECTED BY
HIV AND AIDS

40 Days of Prayer for Persons Living With and Affected by HIV and AIDS

This resource is designed to be used for prayer and discernment leading up to World AIDS Day, which is celebrated around the world on December 1. The United Methodist Church's Global AIDS Fund Committee offers this resource as a gift hoping it brings comfort, hope and healing.

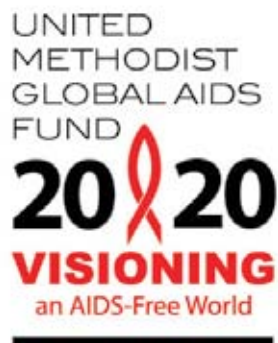
The United Methodist Global AIDS Fund (UMGAF) is an Advance Special Project providing funding to AIDS-related projects around the globe. UMGAF is guided by a committee chaired by Dr. Donald Messer. Representatives from various general agencies serve on the committee. It has been in existence since 2004.

More than \$3 million has been raised to support over 175 projects which provide education and advocacy, care for orphaned children, and care for those living with HIV and AIDS in 38 countries.

To find out more about UMGAF,
visit: www.2020AIDSfreeworld.org;
send an email to: 2020AIDSfreeworld@gmail.com;
phone: 918-289-1274 or 703-282-6254.



To make a monetary contribution to UMGAF, give online at www.givetomission.org, through your church or by mailing your check to United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), PO Box 9068, New York, NY 10087. Make sure to indicate the Advance Special number for UMGAF (#982345).



20/20 Vision for an AIDS-Free World

\$20 can make a difference!

\$20 can stop the transmission of HIV from a mother to child.

\$20 can teach young people and adults how to prevent HIV.

\$20 can be used for church workshops to fight stigma and discrimination.

\$20 can feed an HIV+ person for a month or more, enabling them to take their medicine and lead productive lives.

To join the campaign for an AIDS-free world visit: www.2020aidsfreeworld.org.

DAY01

Many who pursue HIV and AIDS ministry identify with Jesus' parable about the poor widow who keeps confronting the unjust judge. The magistrate, often like the church, would prefer to ignore her pleas for justice and mercy. But she is relentless in her persistence, until in exasperation he declares that "because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continuing coming."

In Sri Lanka Princey, experienced her home being burnt and her family chased out of the village. Instead of hiding, she organized a women's movement to seek justice for all persons living with HIV. In Kenya, Stella spoke out against stigma. Now 750 HIV people are organized as a part of the church's effort to care for everyone in the community.

Those seeking to expand the conscience, compassion, and commitment of the church to be truly active and effective in providing HIV and AIDS education, prevention, care, and treatment discover we need daily to remember the Lord's words: "Pray always and not to lose heart." An AIDS-free world means joining in God's non-stigmatizing healing in the world.

O God, whose Son went everywhere healing and caring for the sick and the marginalized: help us to overcome our own fears and biases. Enable us to reach out in loving compassion to all those in need. Let us not be like the unjust judge, but more like the widow who refused to take "no" for an answer.

In Christ's name, Amen.

Dr. Donald E. Messer, United Methodist Church Global AIDS Fund Committee Chair, Centennial, Colorado

DAY02

To all of us who are affected and infected by AIDS:

I greet you with wishes of peace and love! As a community volunteer and advocate, I would like to thank all of my brothers and sisters for their tireless efforts and countless hours of compassion with our community out-reach programs and day-to-day care of those living with HIV and AIDS.

I pray that WE have the strength and determination to continue our resolve and that everyone involved will continue to evolve with all of the current financial and social-economical challenges.

May God grant us serenity as we fight for a cure and may those that are living with HIV and AIDS know they are loved, accepted, and belong in any society.

At the end of the day. We are family! Amen! Amen!

Ric Foster, Church of the People, Long Beach, California

DAY03

It's a privilege every year to welcome and work with seminary students who do their field education with the General Board of Church & Society (GBCS). At a recent orientation, Fred Smith, who serves as professor at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC, reminded students and mentors to re-think what we mean by *reflection*. Fred explained that the word reflection actually comes from two words: "re" and "flex," or "to bend again."

Consider the image of a house of mirrors. Have you visited a house of mirrors in an amusement park? When you look at yourself in a house of mirrors you may appear thin or large, tall or short. You may not even recognize yourself to be the same person who walked into the amusement park. Actually, you are the same person. Your eyes only need to adjust to seeing who you are differently. The bending light waves and the different shapes of a mirror determine see and who we do not see.

Similarly, our vision of HIV and AIDS is "bent again" by several mirrors: the mirror of our biblical heritage, the mirror of our culture, the mirror of our local church, the mirror of our gender or our vocation, the mirror of our intimate relationships and friendships.

Do we see people living with HIV and AIDS as victims or do we see them as survivors? Do we see ourselves as compassionate caregivers as people for meaning in their illness, or do we perceive ourselves as dispassionate advocates? How are we relocating ourselves to see life from a different angle and perspective of one living with HIV and AIDS? Do we choose to look at the AIDS crisis reflected through the mirror of stifling fear or the mirror of audacious faith?

My friend, Brian Maheva, is a student at United Methodist-related Africa University in Zimbabwe. During a seminar there Brian explained: "In the field of AIDS we are working with quite a few networks, such as Family AIDS Care and Trust in Zimbabwe, Youth Alive, World

Food Program, Swedish Organization for Individual Relief. As youths we focus on behavioral change. The impact we have made is this: We have integrated HIV education into sporting activities and into human rights education. We are using what we call the KAP strategy: (K)nowledge, (A)wareness, (P)ractices. Before the program we have seen youth who were unaware that they had a right to challenge the discrimination they experienced, the stigmatization at the hands of others. But through KAP we address the wrongs in society.”

Brian and his peers are choosing to look at HIV and AIDS through the mirror of justice, inclusion, and human rights. My friend, in Sierra Leone, Dr. Sidney Cooper explained this to me: “Before the war we had about a 0.3 percent rate of HIV and AIDS in our country. After the war the rise of AIDS was exponential. We know lots of women who were raped, but it’s the poverty that keeps killing them and their families and the people. The huge contributing factor is HIV and AIDS. The government and non-governmental organizations are trying to deal with this but as long as we have poverty with us we are going to have the number rising. People are afraid to do the testing, they live with the virus they fear being labeled a sinner. We have a leadership crisis in that we are failing to respond to this fear.”

Ministry among and on behalf of persons living with HIV and AIDS means we “bend again” and look at how communities have dramatically changed because they advocate for persons, or shift human and financial resources to advocate for dignity and human rights.

Children develop the cognitive capacity to empathize between the ages of ten and fourteen months and this moral capacity is enhanced by environmental socialization. Lacking the capacity to empathize makes principled ethical decisions nearly impossible. Too many in church and society are content to pretend as if they are untouched by this pandemic, as if by denial, God’s people living with AIDS and HIV would simply remain silent.

We need to look again at our sisters’ and brothers’ image in the mirror and dare to see who God sees. We take courage in the fact that God chose first to look at us and bless all people as good, marked by an irrepressible spark of the divine. We are made in God’s image, all of us.

If we cannot act with human empathy how do ever hope to remove the collective shame leveled on people living with HIV and AIDS? As adults we are to “bend again.” We need to recognize how life is organized differently for a generation of “bend over” people because of their experience of this disease that we may avoid or at least mitigate our causing personal or collective harm.

The Rev. Neal Christie, Assistant General Secretary for Education and Leadership Formation, General Board of Church and Society, Washington, DC



REFLECTION How can you “bend again” how your community views persons living or affected by HIV and AIDS?

DAY04

One of the topics in my portfolio is domestic violence, which includes the issue of bullying. I've done a lot of thinking about this topic and how people are stigmatized for simply being who they are. How cruel we can be to those who seem "different" to us. How damaging ridicule can be to one's emotional well-being. Bullying can happen in a variety of ways. For those who are infected with the HIV virus, there can be a kind of silent bullying, a shunning, banishing, ostracizing. This silent bullying occurs in all parts of the world, in developed and developing nations. Our fears take over. Instead of resorting to vocal slurs or put-downs we resort to silent rejection: a psychological reality that can lead to suicide, depression and joyless living.

Henri Nouwen has written about the beloved-ness of all human beings: God's caring and unconditional love for all. The book of Isaiah states, "But now says the one who created you, who formed you, 'Fear not for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine... you are precious in my eyes, and honored and I love you.'" (Isaiah 43: 1, 4)

The church has a vital role to play as healers and truth tellers. We are called to challenge silent bullying of all persons including those infected with AIDS. Let us remove any barriers to new life and abundant living and claim messages of love and affirmation. What a difference that would make!

Linda Bales Todd, United Methodist Church Global AIDS Fund Committee member, Director of Women's Advocacy, Louise and Hugh Moore Population Project, General Board of Church and Society, Washington, DC



REFLECTION What barriers exist in the church that prevent people from living abundantly while living with HIV and AIDS?

DAY05

In the early days of the AIDS pandemic Psalm 88 expressed the feelings of so many who lived with the rejection, stigma, judgment and seeming death sentence that accompanied their diagnosis. The deep despair still rings true despite advances in life sustaining medicine. For many, access to these medications is scarce. Psalm 88 speaks of feelings of abandonment by God and hopelessness related to disease. It speaks of the feeling that God is causing immeasurable suffering to come upon the one afflicted. It concludes by saying that God has "caused friend and neighbor to shun me."

Certainly, the plea of the Psalmist is the plea of those who face hopelessness, suffering and death because the will of those who could help and the resources are not provided to make a difference for them. Our prayers call us to actions that alleviate the judgments, address the fears, and provide the resources for medical treatments and healthy nourishment.

Gracious and compassionate God,

You hear the painful cries of your people and your Spirit awakens in us the awareness that we are your hands and feet, sent to accomplish your work in this world.

May we respond to the leading of your Spirit and take on the work you have given us to do. In the name of your Son, our Christ. Amen.

The Rev. Ed Hansen, retired, Spiritual Director, Strength for the Journey retreat, 1988 to 2011, California-Pacific Annual Conference

DAY 06

O God, You created all people in Your image. We thank You for the astonishing variety of races and cultures in this land. Every life has sacred worth in Your eyes. You hate nothing You have made. Look with empathy, O Heavenly Father, upon the people in this land who live with injustice, terror, disease and death as their constant companions.

God of compassion, have mercy on the sick, the wounded, the forgotten, the weak, the oppressed, the persecuted and the dying. Lord, lead us with Your love to serve all those to whom the world offers no comfort and little help. Help us to overcome the apathy, the barriers of prejudices. Open our hearts, our mind and our eyes.

Why, Lord, in a country as affluent as we are can't we take care of these who have no health care and no one to turn to, waiting for hours, for days and even years to have the gentle touch of love and healing? Lord, You know our problems and weaknesses better than we ourselves. Accept our humble confessions. O God, we are grateful for these servants who have made the sacrifices. We are thankful for the opportunities to serve "the least of them." Eternal Father, we hear the voices of the saints of the past: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, "The strong person is the person who can cut off the chain of hate, the chain of evil."

Somebody has to have religion enough and morality enough to cut off the chain of hate and the chain of evil in the universe and they do that by love. We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of bad people, but for the appalling silence of good people. Mother Teresa said, "to love until it hurts." Responding immediately to the demands of the present moment."

Lord, we cannot wait any longer. Healings must be performed, lives must be reached, the blood of many lives — infants, chil-

dren, youths, adults, elderly — cries for a transfusion of Hope and Love. Use our blood — our lives to bring healing new life.

The time has come. Send us to the dirt roads of our rural communities, to the streets of our urban cities, to the executive offices of our insurance companies, to the town hall meetings, to the chambers of our state legislatures and national capital crying, Have mercy, have mercy on our people. Amen!

The Rev. John Culp, United Methodist Church Global AIDS Fund Committee member, Virginia Wingard Memorial United Methodist Church, South Carolina Annual Conference



FACT At the end of 2009, approximately 33.3 million adults and children were living with HIV and AIDS around the world.

DAY07

God bless you. God bless me. God bless we. We are the world.

In memory of my dear friend Storm, and the many, many, other brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, and children who have passed before me...

Don Garrison, AIDS survivor, Palm Springs, California

DAY08

The Gospel of Matthew describes how Jesus once told a parable to his disciples about laborers in a vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16). The owner of the vineyard contracted with workers early in the morning. The laborers agreed to work all day for what was agreed to be a fair wage. At nine o'clock, seeing the amount of work that remained, the owner found others in the marketplace and ordered them to work, as well, promising to pay them what was right. He did the same at noon, and again at three. At five, he admitted still more workers into the vineyard. At sunset, a manager emerged in order to pay each one what he was owed, giving the men who arrived at day's end as well as at noon the same wage he paid the men who arrived early in the morning.

The men who had arrived first and worked the longest cried foul, insisting it was not fair that those who came late in the day and who had not issued any sweat under the scorching sun should receive the same wage as they. The owner of the vineyard replied that no harm had been done to them, for they had agreed to work for the wage, and that the wage was fair. It was the owner's prerogative, he insisted, to be generous, giving the same amount to those who arrived at noon as well as to those who arrived closer to dusk.

Expectations about the kingdom of heaven were upended in Jesus' teaching. So it is easy to imagine listeners to Jesus' parable being understandably aghast. Yet the key to understanding Jesus' parables

is often to puzzle through moments that provoke or irritate in order to discern meaning. In this parable, Jesus reveals that the kingdom of God is about generosity and acceptance, not righteous condemnation of others. This revelation was probably received in the first century in much the same way such a teaching would be received today. If God is so generous, is Jesus suggesting that we ought to be that generous, as well? Is not such a view naïve? How could the owner of the vineyard be so cavalier, so reckless, so foolhardy, to distribute money with such abandon? Was he intending to create tension between the laborers, inspiring envy among them? Was he inattentive to best practices in management?

Readers of the parable commonly interpret the vineyard to be the kingdom of heaven in the sense of paradise received in an afterlife, and the payment to the laborers in the vineyard the grace from God necessary to enter it — a grace God distributes generously and even with abandon. Those who are faithful early, and who toil in faith for their entire lives, receive the same gracious entry to the heavenly afterlife as those who enter the vineyard, or the church later, even in the dusk of their lives. This interpretation constructs a beautiful image of a God who is generous and hospitable, even in ways that for us would border on reckless. But there is a more profound interpretation still.

What if the kingdom of heaven about which Jesus speaks is not restricted to the afterlife? What if there are implications to Jesus' teachings about the kingdom of heaven for the here and now? After all, Jesus tells the parable after lamenting about how difficult it is for the rich to enter heaven. The parable opens with Jesus explaining that the kingdom of heaven "is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard" (Matthew 20:1). If we interpret the owner to be God, the parable indicates that God's kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, is like a landowner who searches for laborers to work in his vineyard, and who will pay his workers extravagantly out of a model of abundance rather than out of a model of scarcity. He explains that the kingdom of heaven is like

God, the owner who models generosity beyond compare. If Jesus intends the kingdom of heaven to represent not only the realm of the hereafter, but also a peaceful society overflowing with generosity in the here and now, an interpretation consistent with how Jesus taught his disciples to pray about the kingdom earlier in the same Gospel where the faithful ask for God's will to be done "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10), then Jesus' teaching has to do with the role of the faithful in contributing to such a kin-dom, or community of loving kindness, that stands in contrast to the world outside such a community.

The laborers, those who toil for the owner, God, might be those who do the will of the owner not only with an eye to the hereafter "in heaven," but with a heart for the here and now "on earth." The workers in the vineyard might be those who experience a conversion, to be sure: but not a conversion from one religion to another, or from unbelief to faith, but a conversion of heart, to the way of Jesus, to the way of loving kindness, to the way of justice and compassion. Their faith in "the way" will guide them to live attentively to the poor, the widow, the orphan, the prostitute, the leper. They might be the ones who, like their God, give with abandon and without condition, bestowing everything they have physically, materially, and spiritually, in service to such a community of loving kindness. They might be the ones who, like Christ and the prophets before him, resist injustice, recognizing the inherent preciousness and inviolable dignity of all human life. Whether they come to the vineyard early in the morning and toil for such a vision of generosity and justice every hour of their lives; whether they convert to a commitment to justice "at noon" but embody it not as fully as those who labor in the vineyard from the early morning; whether they can give only a little because they recognized the beauty of such a way in the twilight of their lives or because there are obstacles that prevent them from embodying it as fully as the first, the reward will be the same.

This interpretation understands the payment, the grace, to be the yield from the vineyard itself. The harvest of such a society is living in safety and security, where neighbors joyfully attend to one another's

needs. The owner extends the payment, after all, from the vineyard's yield. The vineyard is the source of the abundance from which he draws to give them what is right: the first fruits of the creation of a more just dwelling place, a paradise of peace and loving kindness regained yet still awaiting completion. Such a community requires the investment of the collective, even of those who can give it only a little. With a unity of vision, imagining in hope the world as it can be, the message of the parable is that such a vision is worthwhile. And, in bringing it into being, every contribution is valued equally.

Such an interpretation gives greater fullness and depth of meaning to Jesus' teaching. Pressing the parable forward through the ages, echoes of Jesus' words can be understood in our own day to be an invitation to labor in the vineyard, bringing such a community of peace and *g'milut chasadim* (acts of loving kindness) into being on earth. Perhaps we can read in the pages of this text sacred to Christians an invitation to participate in the creation of such unity of heaven and earth, a paradise realized to a degree in the here and now: a beautiful community which recognizes that where one is diminished, all are diminished, and where one is nourished, all are nourished.

The implication of the parable for an age of AIDS is both mysterious and profound. If we recognize the intricate degree to which humans are interrelated and interdependent not only for survival but also for true human thriving in the most holistic sense, we will see that where one is HIV-positive, all are HIV-positive. Given such a perspective, Jesus extends an invitation that echoes from his day into our own. Do something, he implores us — even just a little something — to alleviate and to prevent human suffering. Because, he promises, in God's imagination, all works of mercy, compassion, and justice will be valued. Such a conversion of heart will be its own reward.

Kimberly Vrudny, Associate Professor in Systematic Theology, St. Thomas University, creator of "30 years 30 lives" photo exhibit, <http://30years30lives.org>, St. Paul, Minnesota

DAY09

Holy God, I pray your blessing on all the efforts being made to find solutions for those living with the consequences of HIV and AIDS. The children of your creation want whole and healthy lives. May the world population come to see the need for real and earnest care for those who live with this dreaded disease.

In the name of the healing Christ, Amen.

Al Bohnstedt, Board of Director, General Board of Church and Society, Fort Wayne, Indiana



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH BELIEVES

“All Individuals living with HIV and AIDS should be treated with dignity and respect.”

(Social Principles 162.U)

DAY10

Creator God,

*You give life to every human creature;
You nurture us in childhood and
Tend to our needs day by day.*

Healing God,

*When illness comes and life is threatened by disease and pain,
You restore health and wholeness and
overcome infirmity and suffering.*

Saving God,

*When HIV and AIDS infects millions of your children and
leaves a trail of death and sorrow,
You do not abandon anyone but
You provide strength and comfort and
Guide the search for medical care that can sustain life and
bring hope.*

Listening God,

When World AIDS Day comes again,

*You inspire our planning and bring people together
for remembrance and commitment, and You lead us
in the quest for an AIDS-free world.*

Thank you, O God of mercy, for the work of the United Methodist Global AIDS Fund and hear our prayers we ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Bishop Fritz Mutti, first co-chair of United Methodist Church Global AIDS Fund Committee, retired Bishop Kansas Annual Conference

DAY11

God's promises must have meaning and relevance to the poorest and most vulnerable of us or else they have no relevance for anyone. A young Kenyan girl named Peninah highlights the truth of this.

Like so many children, Peninah was orphaned at the tender age of 12 in the wake of the AIDS pandemic and left with siblings to care for. To make matters worse, an uncle quickly stole the best of the land Peninah's parents had left for her. Hungry, alone, and frightened, Peninah was approached by a man with the offer of \$8 and some bread. With a hungry brother at home, and no other options before her, this young girl accepted. Peninah became pregnant and gave birth, with no way to care for her infant or her family.

Peninah was introduced to ZOE's empowerment program in 2008. This project is one of many that receives funding from the United Methodist Global AIDS Fund. I met her for the first time in 2010. She bore witness to the redemptive power of Jesus Christ. As she so tenderly cared for her child, I was reminded that only Jesus could turn such a horrible situation into something so precious and beautiful. Peninah spoke with such pride about her daughter and her ability to now care for the child properly. Peninah told the story of how ZOE had transformed her life.

Her Working (support) Group of orphans approached the local chief and petitioned for Peninah's land to be returned to her. The chief agreed. ZOE provided a goat and \$100 worth of input for her farm. The other orphans in her support group helped Peninah cultivate her five acres of land. She was then trained in tailoring and received a start-up kit from ZOE for her new business.

Today, at age 16, Peninah's small family no longer needs any assistance. She has a productive farm, ten goats, two cows,

chickens, and a thriving tailoring business in the local market area. She is a devoted follower of Jesus Christ who now actively assists in offering care to other orphans in her community.

A woman from the states, who met Peninah, stated that she had waited her whole life to witness a miracle. After she met Peninah she stated, "I have now seen that miracle." Your involvement with the United Methodist Global AIDS Fund is a means through which God miraculously transforms lives!

The Rev. Greg Jenks, ZOE Executive Director, United Methodist Church Global AIDS Fund Committee resource person



THE WORD OF GOD

"Carry each other's burden, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." *Galatians 6:2*

DAY12

O Holy One, Spirit of all creation;

You who kissed us into life at our birth;

Breathe into us now as we inhale.

Breathe out of us, too, as we exhale.

May we be one with you, surely inspirited.

May we be one with those in our daily lives; awake to the life and breath swirling around us this day.

And may we be lifted up on Your wings, borne on the breath of dawn, and held in Your hands.

O Holy One, Spirit of all creation,

We breathe in and breathe out, and give thanks. Amen.

The Rev. Twila Gibbens, St. Paul United Methodist Church, Tulsa, Oklahoma

DAY13

O holy and loving God, we praise you for your loving presence in all of life. Our hearts break as we witness the ravages of HIV and AIDS in the lives of persons of every age, every race, and every circumstance of life throughout the globe. We pray that you will touch each person with renewed hope and with healing. Instill in each of us a revitalized commitment to work for the eradication of this dreadful disease. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray.

Bishop Jane Allen Middleton, Susquehanna Annual Conference, Board of Director, General Board of Church and Society

DAY14

Good and Gracious God,

We confess that even as we work to bring your light into the darkness of our hurting world, we have maintained dark corners in our own lives.

Give us the strength to open those closed doors and allow your presence to clear away the debris of our weakness so that your light can shine more powerfully through us into the lives and souls of others.

We know that your light will encourage the fearful, strengthen the weak, enliven the indifferent, and uplift us all.

Thank you for others who have gone before us and for all those who now walk beside us on this journey toward freedom from the scourge of AIDS.

Most of all, thank you for your love and grace, unearned and unending, which sustains us.

We pray for wisdom, vision, and courage as we seek to do your will in sharing that love will all others in your kingdom.

Jerry Longwell, AIDS Coordinator, Central Texas Annual Conference, Ft. Worth

DAY15

The E.C. Tyree Health & Dental Clinic has ventured across the ages to tackle educating about HIV and the importance of getting tested. Several intimate personal avenues with groups have led the challenge. We are seeing all aspects of awareness levels, and we still have much work to do. The main focus is to change the stigma around being tested. We are trying to have everyone tested so individuals aren't singled out but rather having the test be routine. One 35-year-old lady came to the clinic, and we offered to give her a test. She was adamant that she didn't want to know. After further consulting about other conditions and the fact that it should be done, she agreed.

During the wait and counseling, the client was completely distraught. Once she was read her negative result and educated on how to continue safe sexual health, she was extremely thankful for knowing. She went on and on about what a new outlook she had on this issue and wouldn't be the same. On the same note we had a 21-year-old male come up positive for HIV and he gave no reaction at all to the results. He didn't seem bothered by it and was okay with it. We have all dynamics of acceptance.

On national testing day we had the whole youth group tested. Education was provided on the importance of waiting until marriage and challenging the youths to make an oath for themselves. We also regularly go to the Treehouse. It is an organization that provides assistance to pregnant Hispanic moms of all ages. We thought there would be a lot of reservations doing a test as a group, but overall once one or two took the test, all of the group followed. It opens the doors to see where we need to educate so that individuals can make informed decisions and where to go when they don't have the answers.

United Methodist Church Global AIDS Fund grant at work

DAY16

*Loving God,
Show me the truth about myself,
No matter how wonderfully it might be!*

*Holding nothing back
I release the pain
The hurt
The disappointment
The depression
The anxiety
That cause me harm
Holding nothing back
I trust your blessing
Sacred, HolyOne
Even when I cannot
See it
Feel it
Believe it
Yes, I will be disappointed
Hurt again
But that's okay
God is with me
Holding nothing back!*

*God, sweep away my fear
Sweep away my fear
Sweep away my fear
Christ, clear away despair
Clear away despair
Clear away despair
Holy Spirit, heal my heart
Heal my heart
Heal my heart
Amen.*

The Rev. Steve Poteete-Marshall, Walnut United Methodist Church, written at Strength for the Journey Camp: a camp for people living with HIV and AIDS in the California-Pacific Annual Conference

DAY17

Dear loving Creator,

Thank you for the gift of community you have given us in our relationships with one another. Thank you for the strength, love, and hope that can come from our communities.

Lord, help us all to realize that we are part of a community of your children sent here to care for and love one another. Help each and every one of us to live our lives in a way that honors this amazing gift and responsibility.

Give us the wisdom to know that you have created us all equally in your image and that in doing so you call us to treat and love each other with the same intensity and devotion that we love ourselves. Aid us all in the realization that a world free of pain, suffering, violence, illness, and poverty is possible through the gift of community you have given us.

Dear God, help me to be a source of strength, love, and hope for all of my brothers and sisters. Give me the courage to stand in solidarity with the world and its suffering. Give me the tools I need to bring about positive and lasting change.

My dear loving Creator, assist me in my role of bringing the kingdom of heaven to the world. In your holy and precious name, Amen.

Maddie Allsup, Iliff School of Theology, Master in Divinity student

DAY18

In recognition of HIV and AIDS awareness month the H.U.B. of Hope and New Horizons, a Latina ministry of The United Methodist Church of the Open Door, held a seminar and discussion for the women and teachers in the group. The seminar took place on June 2, 2011 at 10 in the morning at the United Methodist Church of the Open Door in Kennett Square. Ten women attended: six students from the ESL class, a bilingual Latina who served as translator, two teachers, and the presenter, the Rev. Dr. Deborah Tanksley-Brown.

The presenter began by finding out what the group knew about HIV and AIDS by asking some true/false questions. She exposed some of the common myths about the disease and invited the women to ask questions. The participants were actively involved, asking questions and generating discussion. At times the energy of the dialogue required the use of Spanish so that those who didn't understand had to wait for the translation.

The participants appeared to be completely comfortable sitting around the table in a place that they knew and with people they trusted. They seemed to welcome the opportunity to learn about an important topic that relates directly to their own well-being. The atmosphere was relaxed enough to include laughter. At the end of the session the general feeling was one of time well-spent.

United Methodist Church Global AIDS Fund grant at work

DAY19

“No problem, I’d be glad to help out,” I said almost reflexively, when I was approached about writing a devotional for the 40 Days of Prayer. I had written devotionals a number of other times before, so I didn’t think writing another would be too difficult. It was only after sitting down at the blank computer screen that I began to reconsider my offer. I realized that I didn’t have much more than a cursory knowledge of HIV and AIDS.

What could I say, I asked myself, that wouldn’t sound trite or superficial? As I thought more about this increasingly daunting task, it became apparent to me that my lack of knowledge about HIV and AIDS was a reflection of my position of privilege. My race, class, and nationality have shaped my experiences with the disease, allowing me to maintain only general knowledge about it.

We cannot choose the privilege that we may or may not have in society, but we can choose what we do about it. My privilege cannot be an excuse for neglect, ignorance, or apathy about HIV and AIDS, for we are all children of God. When any one person is hurting, we all hurt. All people deserve to live with dignity and wholeness. It is with deep humility and gratitude that I thank our life-giving and nurturing Creator for moving me from a place of ignorance to compassion. Amen.

Kurt Karandy, Board of Director, General Board of Church and Society, New Haven, Connecticut

DAY20

We can **Act** for persons living with HIV and AIDS by:

Informing our friends, church and conference,

Donating to United Methodist Global AIDS Fund and,

Saying a prayer that God will use us to eradicate HIV and AIDS.

God, grant me the courage to speak up against stigma and discrimination. Use me as your hands and feet to help care for those infected and affected. And teach me to love all your children more deeply so we may work together to eradicate this disease. Amen.

Rebecca Yount, 20/20: Visioning an AIDS-Free World Coordinator



FACT Worldwide, most people living with HIV are unaware they are infected.

DAY 21

Our Loving God,

We remember how Jesus came among us as a healer. We remember how he touched with love, spoke with compassion, and prayed with empathy for those who were sick and suffering. How they experienced his love, compassion and empathy and were made well in body, mind and soul. Today we pray that everyone who is infected or affected by HIV and AIDS can imagine the loving hands of Jesus touching them and hearing the compassionate words of Jesus spoken to them bringing healing and hope.

O God, we also pray that those who suffer might feel your unconditional love and acceptance and our unconditional love and acceptance in their lives. Forgive us when forget that Jesus told us not to judge each other but to love each other the same way he has loved us, which is with an unconditional, non judgmental and eternal love.

O God, thank you for the compassionate people who devote their time, love, energy and skills in caring for those who suffer. Thank you for those generous persons who share their resources in caring for the sick, oppressed, or rejected. May we all follow the example of your son and open wide our hearts and hands in sharing your love with all those around us.

In God's name, Amen.

The Rev. Kent Millard, founding member of United Methodist Church Global AIDS Fund Committee, retired Senior Pastor, St. Luke's United Methodist Church, Indianapolis, Indiana

DAY 22

My (Our) Eternal and All Wise God,

*Just as You have from the Beginning
I (We) Dream a World of Wholeness
A World of Pure Humanity
A World of Life—Giving Love
No Matter the Difference—
Gender, race, age, sexual orientation, religion, health challenge
or able-bodiedness
A World of Life—Generating Love
Whether Cancer, HIV-AIDS, Multiple Sclerosis, HIV-AIDS, Diabetes,
HIV-AIDS, Heart Disease, HIV-AIDS, etc*

*I (We) Dream a World of Humanity & Wholeness
Everyday and not just in Days of Crisis
I (We) Dream a World that makes You Proud
Instead of Opposing Your Vision of a Beloved Community or
Grieving Your Heart and Spirit*

*In short, I (We) Dream a World of Community, Life,
Liberation, Equality and Justice for ALL!*

*I (We) Worship & Praise You with Confidence that One Day Soon
This Dream will Come True*

*In Jesus, precious name,
and by the power of His Holy Spirit, AMEN!*

Val Jackson, Iliff School of Theology, Doctorate of Ministry student

DAY 23

I sometimes wonder if we have to be in a desperate situation to really appreciate the message of our faith. I have discovered that I see the power of God's love most clearly when it is being experienced by those who have felt denied such love. I suppose that's why I have continued my involvement with the Strength for the Journey retreat for persons living with HIV and AIDS. When we began this ministry in 1988, sponsored by the California-Pacific Conference of our United Methodist Church, the campers felt like they had a death sentence hanging over them. Today it is different. Now their challenge is to reclaim the possibility of continuing life, to truly live with HIV, to manage this disease with careful adherence to medications, and to believe in a future that gives them something to live for.

It is amazing to see people pull back from their feelings of despair and turn toward a new understanding that they are not lost, they need not live with overwhelming shame, and they can celebrate the gift of their unique lives. The message of God's love that we share in the Strength for the Journey retreat is truly saving and life-giving.

Wonderful and amazing God, today I give thanks that you love all people everywhere and that those who need to know your love the most are awakened to new life when they experience your love in the loving words and deeds of your people.

And I give thanks that my own faith is renewed and uplifted when I see the power of your love bringing healing to the lives of those who have known the suffering of disease and the rejection and judgments of those who don't understand.

May our lives always witness to your loving Spirit. Amen.

The Rev. Ed Hansen, retired, Spiritual Director, Strength for the Journey retreat, 1988 to 2011, California-Pacific Annual Conference

DAY 24

I thank God for being here today. Many of our loved ones have gone to heaven's gate and look over us each day.

Why are some of us still here after 30 years of suffering, living day by day, wondering, when we will be next to go?

Family, friends and our pets and the community have saved us from being alone, which a lot of us are after people learn that we are infected and live in a different world. But we don't, we are here in one world, which has evolved in the unity of our churches that have opened their doors and accept us as we are, not a homophobic world as we once knew. We still want to celebrate the day of the cure to come.

We still remember those times and days: what we and all our friends and partners went through and still do, so many pills, schedules to remember to take our pills and the changes in our bodies.

Loving people can see through our eyes and hear through our words of lives past. We are strong and continue to be remembered through the years with God's love.

Steven Acevedo, Hollywood United Methodist Church, California-Pacific Annual Conference

DAY 25

Imagine getting a gift of a simple 75-watt light bulb! What would be our response? Would there be squeals of delight and smiles of joy? Probably not, we expect far more.

Yet, I visited a child-headed household in rural India where three little kids received light for the first time in their small two-room cement block house. No furniture, no beds, no toys, and no bathroom, but for the first time a barren light bulb in one corner. When I turned on the electricity, their squeals and smiles reduced me to tears.

Their parents both died from AIDS. Siva, 15, malnourished, works with his raw hands six days a week for 10 hours a day at a poultry farm cleaning eggs with a formaldehyde substance. The \$44/month he earns goes towards buying food and paying off the 5,000 rupee debt his father accumulated while he was sick. His sister, Gomathi, 12, suffers from tuberculosis, but rises at 6 a.m. to cook and clean, and then goes to school, catching a bus at 7 a.m. and returning about 7 p.m. Together they care for their beautiful 8-year-old brother, Murugan, who is HIV-positive. Brave children, caring for one another, fighting to survive. "Now I can read my school lesson," whispered Gomathi.

This child-headed household struggles to survive in an incredibly difficult world, but they get needed assistance, thanks to a Women and Children's Health Center initiated through the United Methodist Global AIDS Fund. Under the direction of N. M. Samuel, M.D., this Center provides free care to impoverished women and children infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. The clinic operates yearly on faith and hope, relying on gifts to cover a budget of about \$25,000.

Siva, Gomathi, and Murugan are but three of the 1,415 patients helped by the center last year. On any given day, the clinic treats from 75 to 100 women and from 5 to 60 children.

This little light bulb is a vivid reminder of how United Methodists prove to be "the light of the world" through the United Methodist Global AIDS Fund. By bringing health and help, we spread Christ's love and light throughout the world.

Dr. Don Messer, United Methodist Church Global AIDS Fund Committee Chair, Centennial, Colorado

DAY 26

Creator: We send prayers to all of the orphans from HIV and AIDS like Hassan in Jalingo, Nigeria and other orphans in Zululand, Nigeria and Zimbabwe and so many others places. We send prayers to all children, women and men around the globe who suffer from HIV and AIDS.

We send love and prayers to people like Victoria in Liberia, Africa who manages a Health Clinic for testing persons for HIV & AIDS. Be with her as she starts a support group for women who are cast out of their families for having HIV AIDS. Help her to empower women to have better lives and to encourage their husbands to be tested.

And we send love and prayers to persons like Andrew working at Nebraska AIDS Project in Kearney as our hands and feet, assisting clients with HIV and AIDS in Nebraska and the 21 other states that have waiting lists for medical emergencies. We pray they will find ways to collaborate and help others in need.

Help us to find ways to invite others to take offerings, do AIDS Walks, start and promote testing sites like the one through Trinity United Methodist Church, Grand Island, Nebraska with Kim and the parish nurse program working with Susan the Educator with Central Health Center.

Give us the courage to get to know new people so we can start local emergency funds and local HIV and AIDS projects as faith communities as a faith response.

Help us as we recruit AIDS Ambassadors in our local churches to promote special offerings and as we do fundraising 20/20: Visioning an AIDS-Free World to eliminate HIV and AIDS by 2020 in our lifetime! Amen!

Maureen Vetter, Grand Island, Nebraska, co-chair of Nebraska United Methodist Global AIDS Fund task force

DAY 27

May we pray together today, to the god of our choosing, to help eradicate AIDS from our global family.

May we pray today for those suffering, surviving, thriving, and dying with HIV and AIDS across the globe.

May we honor those fighting, working, searching, and praying for a cure.

May we remember those loved, cherished, respected, and lost to this horrific epidemic.

May we love those who have been persecuted, ignored, rejected, and hated because of this disease.

May we understand that the fight against AIDS spans all cultural, religious, secular, educational, and physical boundaries; there is not a person in the present or future who cannot be affected by AIDS.

May we be able to help educate those around the globe who do not understand AIDS and its effects.

May we be able to put down our assumptions about those persons with AIDS and treat them with the love and respect that God grants us all.

Elizabeth Jaenicke, Iliff School of Theology, Master of Arts in Social Change student, former Peace Corp volunteer in Malawi, Africa

DAY 28

Sweet music and comforting voices filled the room where Oran laid. A 24-hour vigil was kept by those that called Oran friend, companion, son, teacher or colleague. As I sat near the bedside of my friend and colleague Oran, I could only wonder what was this disease that was taking his very breath and leaving his body frail and weak. It was in the year 1989 and little was known to me about this disease that I later learned was called AIDS. What I did know is that whatever this disease was it was taking the life from my dear friend and there was nothing I or others could do to stop it.

Oran was our school's music teacher. He shared his wonderful gift with our junior high school students and in every note and cord he touched lives: releasing in them the freedom to play music, no matter how it sounded to others. "Make a joyful noise!" (Psalm 98:4) Oran would tell his students. "Each note of music you play the Creator loves to hear!" So the halls of our school echoed with sounds of "joyful noise."

As Oran's last breath was released into the universe, and his journey from this earth plane back to Creator began, the last sounds he heard were the "joyful noise" made by those students he had taught. Sing praises to the Lord for this life of Oran! He was a giver and receiver of "joyful noise".

Boe Harris, Board of Director, General Board of Church and Society, Seaford, Delaware

DAY 29

I said, “Let days speak, and many years teach wisdom.” But truly, it is the spirit in a mortal, the breath of the Almighty, that makes for understanding.” (Job 32: 7-8).

I remember the fervor of my friend Mary. It was 1987, and she was insistent that I read Randy Shilt’s new book *And the Band Played On*. She was incensed at the incompetence and apathy the book revealed that had allowed the aggressive spread of AIDS. In the spirit of a prophet, she was insistent that I, and all others who would listen, become informed.

The truth couldn’t be contained, and we learned, with horror, of the catastrophic spread of this disease we were just beginning to understand. We lost friends, we stood in tears at memorial services, and were numb in the presence of an AIDS quilt that kept growing and growing.

And then, as the years progressed, the medical profession found ways to extend the life span of those living with HIV and AIDS, and those of us in the United States were lulled into an unwarranted complacency. As author Joan Didion has said, “We forgot all too soon the things we thought we could never forget.”

Just as Randy Shilts was a 1987 voice in the wilderness, many today keep reminding us of the crisis still in front of us. This 40 Days of Prayer calls us to remember the millions worldwide living with HIV, to remember the children orphaned or ill, and to hold in our hearts and prayers those newly infected each year.

Beloved God, who cares for us all. Open our hearts and minds to the needs around us. Breathe understanding into our being. May we never forget, may we never become complacent, may we never fail to work and pray for the health of all of your children. In the name of our healer, Jesus. AMEN!

Amory Peck, Board of Director, General Board of Church and Society, Bellingham, Washington

DAY 30

Dear Heavenly Father/Mother,

Each day brings us all challenges and opportunities. The challenges are varied and many: conflicts with a spouse, partner, parent, friend; troubles with money or our job; the daily struggle of finding one’s motivation to keep on living a life of purpose.

But no matter what the challenge someone might be facing, we all as neighbors, family, friends, coworkers have the opportunity to show love, compassion, and solidarity to anyone who is struggling with something in their life.

For those living with HIV around the world, life’s daily challenges are augmented much of the time by stigma and discrimination from their families, neighbors, coworkers, or even medical personnel. Please help us to stand by them, share a hug or whatever might be needed so that we might share and they might be reminded of your everlasting love. AMEN.

Christy Lafferty, former Mission Intern, Fundraiser with Fundación Nimehuatzin, Nicaraguan non-profit working in the area of HIV and AIDS prevention

DAY 31

God of all things,

Awaken us to your call of justice and compassion. Enliven us to your care for one another.

Stir us into action so that we might be pushed beyond our comfort zones and into the uneasy awareness that we must work for more: more justice, more concern, more advocacy, more empathy, more activism, more honesty, and more doing.

Cause us to do more so that we are not stuck in the place of doing less than we are fully capable, but instead are in the place that leads to less partiality, less prejudice, less fear, less politicking, and less superficiality. Sustaining and loving God, challenge us!

Laurie Day, Associate Director of Connectional Ministries, Rocky Mountain Annual Conference



FACT In 2009, 1.8 million people died of AIDS; 260,000 were children under 15 years of age.

DAY 32

Holy and Loving God,

We give you thanks each and every day for the blessings we constantly take for granted: for the air we breathe, for the food we eat, for the community that supports us, and for your over-abundant love. We thank you for not only walking with us on the journey of our lives but challenging us to walk with you as representatives of love in action. May we heed your call to love you with all that we are and love our neighbor as ourselves. Help us to see you in the eyes of all those who are hungry, in prison, thirsty, sick, naked, or a stranger. Inspire us to respond in ways that have a lasting influence on your world and will bring about your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.

The Rev. Jennifer Long, Oklahoma City University Wesley Foundation



THE WORD OF GOD

“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” John 10:10

DAY 33

The Body of Christ has HIV and AIDS.

Forgive us, God, for we know not what we do.

Forgive us, God, for we act as if the Body of Christ himself does not have HIV and AIDS.

Forgive us, God, for our indifference and ignorance in the struggle with HIV and AIDS.

Forgive us, God, when we think HIV and AIDS is not our problem and does not affect us.

Forgive us, God, for the homophobia rooted in the church, which underlies the neglect and outright hatred towards persons with HIV and AIDS.

Forgive us, God, for still thinking that HIV and AIDS is a “gay disease.”

Forgive us, God, for our woefully insufficient response to this disease ravaging communities worldwide.

Forgive us, God, for privileging mosquito nets over condoms and clean needles.

Forgive us, God.

Or perhaps you should not forgive us, God.

Until we commit acts of active repentance.

Move us, God, to know what we do and do not do that continues to perpetuate this disease.

Move us, God, to see clearly the Christ who lives and suffers with HIV and AIDS.

Move us, God, to overcome indifference and ignorance about HIV and AIDS.

Move us, God, to see how HIV and AIDS affects our local communities and the Body of Christ worldwide.

Move us, God, to defeat the homophobia and hatred towards gay persons in the church.

Move us, God, to delink this disease from homophobia.

Move us, God, to act with sufficient passion and resources to address the stigma and disease of HIV and AIDS.

Move us, God, to be as publicly and corporately committed to confront the HIV and AIDS crisis as we are to confront malaria.

Empower us by our desire for your forgiveness to act as the Body of Christ, with and for the Body of Christ who lives and dies with HIV and AIDS.

The Rev. Julie Todd, New England Annual Conference



FAITH IN ACTION Become a “Covenant to Care” congregation. Learn more at <http://gbgm-umc.org/programs/hiv/caregod.stm>

DAY 34

His name was Randy. In the early 1990s I was working in a small real estate office. We had a great atmosphere but Randy was a little uncomfortable around me. It bothered him that I never cursed or told off-color jokes and that I professed being a Christian. Little did he know that if he had met me just a few months earlier that would not have been the case. In February of 1990, at the end of a Walk to Emmaus weekend, I made the commitment to clean up my language.

In 1991 or 1992, we were told that Randy had AIDS. Remember, this is the early 1990s and we were not as knowledgeable about AIDS and how one might be infected. One of the hardest decisions I have ever made was whether to go to the hospital to visit Randy. Once I got the courage to, I was faced with the decision on what to do when I got to his room. I entered the room. Randy was growing weaker each hour. I went to his bed, reached out and held his hand. After Randy died his mother told me that my visit was the most meaningful because I actually made physical contact with him. Randy knew I was a Christian and I think it helped him as he came to the end of his life. Obviously, the visit and touching Randy to show involvement did not cause me to get infected.

I find this story encouraging. It certainly shows how far we have come in 30 years. Yet, we do have much more to do. We have learned that when someone is sick, regardless of the reason, we are called to treat him or her as Christ treated the sick. This is not a time for shunning or condemnation but a time of grace and love. I pray for a world where all are treated with compassion. I give thanks to God for my friend, Randy, and his friendship that helped me step out of my comfort zone and gave me the opportunity to be Christ like.

Lord, grant us compassion and courage to reach out and touch those who are ill. May we follow the example that you set for us. Amen.

Richard Hearne, Board of Director, General Board of Church and Society, Dallas, Texas

DAY 35

People can be infected with HIV through blood, semen, vaginal secretions, and breast milk. These specific fluids must come in contact with a mucous membrane or damaged tissue or be directly injected into the bloodstream from a needle or syringe for transmission to possibly occur. May we join together to pray, educate and stop the spread of AIDS through all ways persons can be infected. And may we join together to stand beside and care for those persons infected and affected by HIV and AIDS.

Jeanna Wagle, HIV+ and HEP C+ and living well, Los Angeles, California



REFLECTION What can you do to help prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS?

DAY 36

My best friend informed me that she was HIV-positive about 18 years ago. We watched as her partner went from a strapping “in your face man” to a frail being who was losing everything that God blessed him with, including a newborn son. Not long after that he went to be with his Maker. Being ignorant to this very new and fatal disease I feared my friend would be next and how could I deal with her suffering before she too was taken from me and her family. Not only did our bond get stronger, but I, too, was educated about HIV and AIDS through her tireless efforts and teachings on this dreaded disease that took so many from us and continues to do so.

Needless to say, 18 years later I still have my “Bestie” and she continues to amaze me every single day. God has not only blessed her with life, but also blessed the many people and organizations in which she gives so much of herself through selfless research and teachings.

N = Nurturing

A = Aiding

N = Nice

C = Caring

Y = You are loved

Debbie Papanic, Whittier, California

DAY 37

God of grace and mercy, healing and hope,

There are times when our stuff gets in the way of your calling. Many times we know how you'd like us to react but our own discomforts and uneasiness cloud your vision for us. We know you to be a welcoming God perfectly exemplified in the person of Jesus, the one we call Christ. One who extends grace to all people, even in crossing societal norms; yet, we find yours a difficult example to follow.

O God, too often this is the case when we talk about HIV and AIDS. We'd rather not think about how it was contracted, but at the same time that is all we can think about. Too often we get caught up in a spirit of retributive justice, a “you got what's coming to you” mentality, rather than responding out of the grace that was first extended to us.

Help us, Gracious One, to truly follow the ways of the One who healed without question, even on the Sabbath, instead of perpetuating a culture of “unclean” lepers. And challenge us to accept that our passing judgment against segments of our society contribute to new HIV infections rather than reducing them. Open our eyes—give us 20/20 vision—so that we may see that racism, homophobia, bi-phobia, and trans-phobia, in addition to a general reluctance to talk about sex in the church, are all complicit in the continuing rise of HIV-infection rates among young gay men and transgender women of color.

May your Holy Spirit comfort those who are hurting and dis-comfort those of us who are complicit in their dis-ease. In your healing and mercy, Amen.

The Rev. Gregory Gross, Deacon, Northern Illinois Annual Conference, Clinical Manager of the HIV Testing & Prevention Program, Center on Halsted, Chicago

DAY 38

I sit here at my work desk and look around. I see life. Wherever there is space I see the beautiful pictures of my new baby granddaughter, Gracie Belle. I am blessed. Of course, there are all the work related items: Postlts, my trustworthy stapler, pens and pencils, scissors, my desk and wall calendar. But it's the pictures of Gracie that melt my heart today. My life is good.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11).

June 27, 1992 – hope and future were the last words on my mind. I had just been given my test result that showed I was HIV-positive. Shame, guilt, disgust, the kind of stomach- and throat-gripping fear that once you have experienced it, you are certain life will never be the same.

If my diagnosis was not enough, imagine the horror I felt knowing I was four month pregnant with our son. I knew very little about HIV and AIDS except for the fact AIDS = DEATH that I was certain about. Thoughts ran through my brain like water rushing downstream. Questions came from the thoughts, What about my unborn baby, does he have AIDS? What about my pre-teen daughter, how can I tell her? What about the man I was in love with, the father of my son, did I infect him?

Initially I thought God gave me what I felt I deserved. I was punished for a lifetime of being selfish, for making bad decisions; it was my scarlet letter to bear until I died. One month passed and I still had not told a soul, not one person. The shame was too difficult to bear. The words would not come out of my mouth. Then something happened to change everything. I heard from God. God said I would do good things with my life because of HIV and AIDS; it was all going to be okay.

I would love to say to you that life got better and better. But that's not what happened. My son's father died from an AIDS-related

illness 9 months after our son was born. My family—daughter, son and myself—experienced humiliation, discrimination and alienation from family and others who were ignorant about HIV and AIDS. In the 19 years since I have been infected we have moved 15 times!

“Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be” (Psalms 139:16).

God knew and God had spoken. Throughout these long 19 years I continue to grow and develop into the woman God intended for me to be. I love God. I trust God. God is my Savior, my Lord. God's saving grace continues to be extended toward me as I seek a deeper and more intimate relationship with God.

“We are pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:8).

It's not easy living with AIDS. Sometimes the pressures of everyday life are overwhelming and it's difficult to see the light. But being in relationship with God, having God's love and compassion soothe the bumps, God's strong shoulders to lay my head to rest, nothing else seems to matter. I continue on my journey. My son, now 18 years old is HIV-negative. My daughter is happily married and blessed with the most incredible, beautiful baby girl, Gracie Belle. God's grace IS sufficient. The peace of the Lord engulfs me when I grow weary. A slight breeze crosses my face and I know the Mighty Spirit of God surrounds me. My soul is touched by God's love for me. I am blessed.

Nancy Ramos, person living with AIDS, Los Angeles (California) County public educator

DAY 39

Twenty-five bright-eyed children, many of them orphans, gathered at the front of the small, dirt-floored United Methodist church on Sunday, May 29 to celebrate the important work of training men and women to bring about health and wholeness in the lives of people in their city of Mzuzu in Malawi, a small, land-locked country in Africa. The training was provided by the United Methodist Church Communities of Shalom Initiative. The children were present to celebrate the conclusion of this event. They, along with the adults, sang joyfully some of the well-known United Methodist hymns. The children sat in a corner of the church listening to adults preach and teach, and their attentiveness to the words being shared was intense, as if they grasped the meaning of each spoken word.

These 25 children are receiving the benefits of a grant from the United Methodist Global AIDS Fund, a grant that enables them to fight starvation and extreme poverty. Many of these children are infected with AIDS and are totally on their own as they eak out an existence with little sustenance. The name of the AIDS project is Hope Homes Nutrition project, which is directed by Hanna Makala, a stately, proud United Methodist woman who for the past four years has helped keep these children alive. The grant provides food for the children as well as funding for school uniforms, blankets and shoes. According to the Rev. Copeland Nkhata, pastor of the church, “The United Methodist Church in Mzuzu is a rare beneficiary of this fund and is truly benefiting the children, all of whom are under the age of 18.” Rev. Nkhata is initiating several key projects in Mzuzu as a part of its Communities of Shalom plan. This is one of them. “This project has spared the children from exposure to cold weather, nakedness and shame,” proclaims Nkhata.

“Making a difference by providing hope and nutrition is key for our project. The United Methodist Global AIDS Fund grant is making this possible,” says Nkhata. “In no way can eyes fail to see and hearts fail to perceive the awesome works of God under the warm umbrella of the Mzuzu United Methodist Church. God, in God’s own inscrutable ways, has touched lives to make a difference within, and without the human soul which inevitably finds Emmanuel abiding among God’s people.”

United Methodist Church Global AIDS Fund grants at work

DAY 40

O God of Enduring Hope, never-ending love and everlasting life. We give You thanks for the faith, hope and love that sustain us in our work for healing, justice and liberation.

O God, who will break the silence about this disease? The silence of stigma, the silence of denial, the silence of fear, the silence of ignorance.

O God, when will the silence end? God, grant us the courage to see, to hear, to feel and to act in powerful meaningful ways.

O God of Healing, we remember all those who are living with HIV and AIDS and their families and caregivers. Those who grasp firmly and hopefully to every living moment.

O God of Hope, we remember all those who died: Those whose pain was so great that death would not come soon enough.

O God of Compassion, we remember all those who mourn: grieving parents, orphans and vulnerable children, friends and entire communities.

O God of Justice, we stand with countless others who work to tear down the barriers of poverty and prejudice and break the bonds of silence, fear and discrimination. Be with those who must make their home on the edge of society because of the prejudice and fear of others.

O God, let the truth be known that HIV and AIDS is not a punishment from Thee, but a disease such as cancer, tuberculosis or malaria. Let our Faith compel us to accept that all persons, including those who are living with HIV and AIDS, are made in the image of God and are children of God.

O God, be with those who care for them; listen to them, love them; watch and wait with them. Give us the strength to stand alongside, as you do.

O God, you are present in all places and at all times. We give thanks for all those in caring professions and in medical research. We pray for relief organizations, education workers, medical teams, pharmaceutical companies and for an end to the injustice that makes human life seem worthless.

Remind us that we are in this together: We cannot walk away and we dare not pretend that this is not about us. We all suffer. Help us to work and live as ONE with our brothers and sisters across the globe.

Merciful God, we bring our grief and concern to this gathering. We bring also our thanksgiving and hope for the future.

The Rev. John Culp, United Methodist Church Global AIDS Fund Committee member, Virginia Wingard Memorial United Methodist Church, South Carolina Annual Conference



FAITH IN ACTION Each year, World AIDS Day is observed on December 1. It is a time for special programs on HIV and AIDS education and religious worship services that focus on intercessory and healing prayer, hope in God, and love and compassion in the midst of the HIV and AIDS pandemic.