

HIV/AIDS Overture

Recommendation:

The Presbytery of National Capital overtures the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church USA to equip and mobilize its member congregations to better serve those living among us with HIV-AIDS by the development of the following initiatives:

- 1) A mission based program to create a certificate program in response to the action of the 219th General Assembly (2010), ***“Becoming an HIV and AIDS Competent Church: Prophetic Witness and Compassionate Action”***. This effort will support the church in its continued prophetic witness on issues of HIV and AIDS, to specifically expand the prophetic witness into practical application;
- 2) An annual HIV-AIDS conference which would be conducted in partnership with the ten (10) seminaries of the Presbyterian Church USA;

It is further recommended that the General Assembly instruct the Fund Development Office to work with the Presbyterian AIDS Network (PAN) to coordinate a development strategy and activities to raise the following revenue to support these initiatives:

\$150,000 over a three-year period to be utilized to operationalize these two initiatives.

Rationale:

The 219th General Assembly (2010) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved the document *“Becoming an HIV and AIDS Competent Church: Prophetic Witness and Compassionate Action”* in response to HIV and AIDS pandemic. Included in that document were the following actions (bold added for emphasis):

Challenge the PC(USA) to become an HIV and AIDS competent denomination at all levels of the church and in all its ministries...

Call upon congregations to accept the challenge to become an HIV and AIDS competent church by studying the HIV and AIDS related policies and resources of the PC(USA)...

Develop denominational standards defining the criteria of HIV and AIDS competent congregations and ministries, in accordance with PC(USA) policies and in collaboration with ecumenical partners in HIV and AIDS ministries;

Call upon presbyteries to include pastoral training related to HIV and AIDS competency as part of a qualified candidate’s preparation for ministry.

Commend Presbyterian theological seminaries that have incorporated HIV and AIDS education into their community life.

In response to this action by the 219th General Assembly and the release in 2015 of the 2.0 version of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy for the United States, we propose to develop a four course certificate program that will focus on pastoral care for those living with HIV-AIDS, preaching sermons that lift those oppressed by HIV-AIDS, scientific education to ensure the HIV-AIDS literacy of participants, and practicum study opportunities with local agencies providing services to those living with HIV-AIDS.

The purpose of this program is to gather, equip and mobilize church leaders to develop the skills and resources for creating AIDS Competent Congregations. Without advancing a particular biblical or theological position, the goal is two-fold: 1) increase the health literacy of congregations related to HIV-AIDS and 2) to work with church leaders to formulate and articulate biblical, theological, pastoral and moral/ethical foundations, which are consistent with each church's mission/vision. Throughout the duration of the program, participants will actively work with their congregations to address HIV and AIDS systematically and to integrate the foundations from the program into the everyday life and ministry of their congregations.

In addition to the certificate program, it is essential that the church conduct regular opportunities for the PAN network to gather together and share best practices and skills to further the creation of collaborations in the various presbyteries of the church. The mechanism for this effort would be the annual HIV-AIDS conference which will not only be a platform for the "HIV-AIDS Competent Church" agenda but it will also serve as a recruiting tool for the certificate program as the target audience will primarily be the students of our various seminaries. These are the future leaders of the Presbyterian Church and as such it is imperative that they be introduced to this critical social justice arena during their formative theological education.

Too often, reports such as "Becoming an HIV and AIDS Competent Church: Prophetic Witness and Compassionate Action" are just left to collect dust on shelves. We stand at a critical juncture in the trajectory of this pandemic and if we are to win the battle, it will require all HANDS on deck including first and foremost the church. With financial support from the General Assembly, PAN will be able to systematically develop these two programs that will serve as the benchmarks for creating a standardized approach to the delivery of HIV-AIDS services and ministry throughout the entire body of the Presbyterian Church.

It has been five (5) years since the creation of the report so now is the time to move forward by activating the strategies outlined in the 2010 report. WE look forward to support from the General Assembly to continue this critical work toward getting to ZERO in terms of new infections, deaths related to HIV-AIDS, perinatal infections, and overall discrimination related to HIV-AIDS.