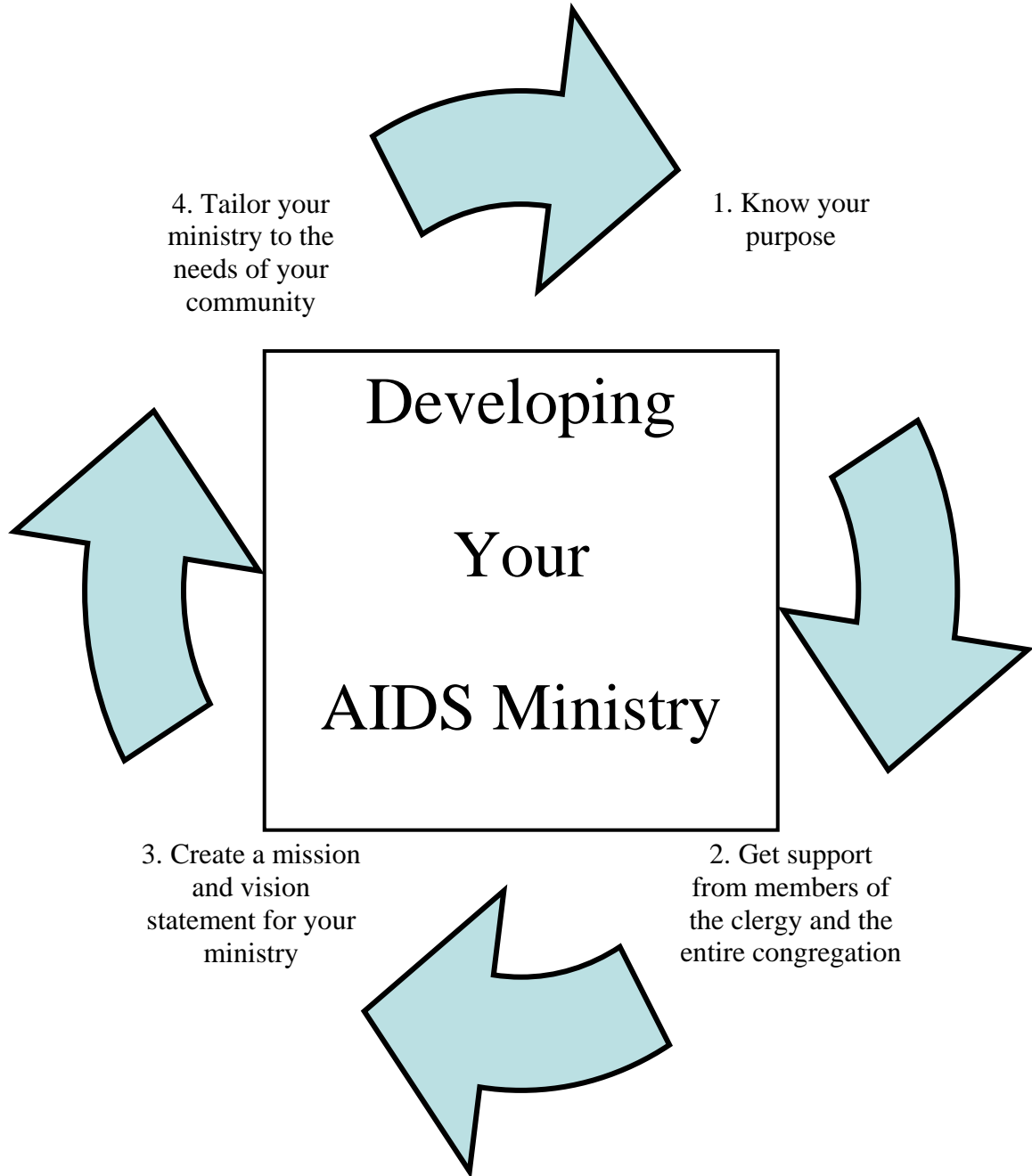


Chapter 3

It starts with each of you



Still plagued by a global epidemic... but the congregation can play a powerful role

Despite being known for 25 years, **HIV** and **AIDS** still remains a largely taboo topic.

AIDS is a global epidemic that continues to plague the land we live in. Twenty-five years after its initial discovery, HIV and AIDS continue to be a very serious disease that knows no name and no face. AIDS is not specific to certain populations or groups of people. We are all affected by AIDS, equally at risk and none of us are exempt from contracting HIV.

We, the church, have a very powerful role in the fight against the AIDS pandemic. But we cannot fight against AIDS with our eyes closed or with our hands tied behind our back. We must go into the community and talk candidly about HIV and AIDS, what it is about and ways it can be prevented. Despite being known about for 25 years, many still do not fully understand the disease or believe it cannot happen to them.

HIV and AIDS often carry a large amount of stigma. The stigma that is associated with AIDS may, in fact, be due to ignorance and not being fully aware of truth about AIDS. In the church, AIDS remains a taboo topic and not until recently did churches really begin to talk about the truth about AIDS. However, there is still much growth needed as we talk about HIV and AIDS in our Faith-based organizations.

Healing cannot happen until there is a union of the mind, the body and the spirit. Health is the existence of peace and wholeness, not merely the absence of disease. The Church provides the HOPE that can provide that union.

Health—the unification of the body, mind and soul.

In 1948, in its constitution, the World Health Organization (WHO) defined health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and **not** merely the absence of disease or infirmity." ¹ Good health is a unification of mind, body and soul.

Faith communities are important for addressing the needs and the well-being of people in the community. Traditionally, all religious customs have focused on the care and the healing of the sick. Throughout the Bible we read about Jesus' healing sick people.

"But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds," declares the LORD. –Jeremiah 30:17. ²

However, when HIV and AIDS have come up in conversation, faith communities have often run in the opposite direction. The stigma that is so largely associated with HIV and AIDS has interfered with the progress in the response to HIV and AIDS. Rather than address the needs of those who are affected and address the needs of the larger community, the illness is often closeted and is a best kept secret. Members who are affected by AIDS may often say they have cancer or some other terminal illness. Cancer kills just like AIDS does, but HIV/AIDS is unique in how widely and heavily the stigma is applied to those affected.

A congregation member being stricken with AIDS is the perfect opportunity to shed light on this devastating disease and educate members about prevention, but often the illness is kept secret. Disclosing the illness is generally unheard of. As the epidemic has progressed, faith communities are beginning to recognize the need to educate its congregation and the larger community about various health issues, particularly HIV and AIDS. Faith communities must also continue to work to alleviate HIV/AIDS related stigma they have contributed to and maintained and truly educate its members about a disease that is very preventable.

An Interfaith Declaration

In an effort to develop an appropriate response to HIV/AIDS from the faith community, coalitions of faith groups worked together to develop a more faithful response consistent with their religious values. The Council of National Religious AIDS Networks, an interfaith coalition, met on this issue 1993. The following is their interfaith statement, portions of which were taken from The African-American Clergy's Declaration of War on HIV/AIDS (The Balm in Gilead Inc., 1994) and from "The Atlanta Declaration" (AIDS National Interfaith Network, 1989). Your faith communities may adapt this or use it as a model.³

We are members of different faith communities called by God to affirm a life of hope and healing in the midst of HIV/AIDS. The enormity of the pandemic itself has compelled us to join forces despite our differences of belief. Our traditions call us to embody and proclaim hope, and to celebrate life and healing in the midst of suffering. AIDS is an affliction of the whole human family, a condition in which we all participate. It is a scandal that many people suffer and grieve in secret. We seek hope amidst the moral and medical tragedies of this pandemic in order to pass on hope for generations to come.

We recognize the fact that there have been barriers among us based on religion, race, class, age, nationality, physical ability, gender and sexual orientation which have generated fear, persecution and even violence. We call upon all sectors of our society, particularly our faith communities, to adopt as highest priority the confrontation of racism, classism, ageism, sexism and homophobia. As long as one member of the human family is afflicted, we all suffer. In that spirit, we declare our response to the AIDS pandemic:

We are called to love: God does not punish with sickness or disease but is present together with us as the source of our strength, courage and hope. The God of our understanding is, in fact, greater than AIDS.

We are called to compassionate care: We must assure that all who are affected by the pandemic (regardless of religion, race, class, age, nationality, physical ability, gender or sexual orientation) will have access to compassionate, non-judgmental care, respect, support and assistance.

We are called to witness and do justice: We are committed to transform public attitudes and policies, supporting the enforcement of all local and federal laws to protect the civil liberties of all persons with AIDS and other disabilities. We further commit to speak publicly about AIDS prevention and compassion for all people.

We promote prevention: Within the context of our respective faiths, we encourage accurate and comprehensive information for the public regarding HIV transmission and means of prevention. We vow to develop comprehensive AIDS prevention programs for our youth and adults.

We acknowledge that we are a global community: While the scourge of AIDS is devastating to the United States, it is much greater in magnitude in other parts of the world community. We recognize our responsibility to encourage AIDS education and prevention policies, especially in the global religious programs we support.

We deplore the sins of intolerance and bigotry: AIDS is not a "gay" disease. It affects men, women and children of all races. We reject the intolerance and bigotry that have caused many to deflect their energy, blame those infected, and become preoccupied with issues of sexuality, worthiness, class status or chemical dependency.

We challenge our society: Because economic disparity and poverty are major contributing factors in the AIDS pandemic and barriers to prevention and treatment, we call upon all sectors of society to seek ways of eliminating poverty in a commitment to a future of hope and security.

We are committed to action: We will seek ways, individually and within our faith communities, to respond to the needs around us.³

First things First

An important first step in creating your HIV/AIDS health ministry is to express the need for a HIV ministry and why it is important your ministry cares about HIV/AIDS. It is important to understand how widely and heavily the stigma is applied to those affected but HIV or AIDS.

Leadership

It is essential that congregational leadership, lay people and clergy, understand and support their congregation's HIV/AIDS ministry. If you are not a member of clergy but an HIV/AIDS ministry is your desire, express your understanding of the need and importance of a HIV/AIDS health ministry with your pastor and other clergy members. Once you have gotten the leaders actively involved, pray about God's will for your church's ministry. Ask others to pray with you. Ask God to bless the ministry so that your ministry will be a blessing to all who are involved and all who are served.

An equally important step in the development of your ministry is creating a mission/vision statement. The mission statement will describe YOUR ministry's overall purpose.⁴ Mission statements are best developed with a committee and collaboration with the pastoral leadership, and then approved by the congregation.

Creating a Mission/Vision Statement

Each faith-based organization should create their own mission statement if they do not already have one. What is the purpose behind having a HIV/AIDS ministry? What do you envision with the work you will be doing? What are your values? What is the mission you and your congregation will set out to do? What is your commitment? Each ministries mission statement will be different as you will be tailoring your mission to the needs of your congregation and the community you serve. Having a

mission statement will give you a clear idea of what it is you want to see and what you hope to accomplish. Without a mission statement, what are you working toward? A mission statement or vision can keep you headed in the right direction rather than being here, there and everywhere without a specific agenda. Sure, your ministry will have good intentions, but without direction it will be difficult for your ministry to fulfill its purpose.

It is essentially important to remember and consider the needs of those your ministry will be serving, whether they are in your congregation or around the community. Your ministry will be most effective when you consider and address the needs of those who you will directly serve. Be sure to consult people with HIV/AIDS who are in your congregation and in your community. AIDS service organizations can also provide very useful input. Also, work to identify families who have been directly impacted by HIV and ask them to help direct your work.

The mission statement will describe your ministry's purpose. Therefore, it should be a powerful statement conveying to others what it is you do.

Example mission statement: "To promote spiritual, physical and mental health to the members of the congregation and community of Englewood."

So, how do you create a mission statement?

1. Cohesion: Ensure there is unity and consistency throughout your HIV/AIDS health ministry. Develop listening skills, negotiation and conflict resolution skills. Ask for help from experts, when needed. Work together as a collective whole rather than a divided unit. You cannot expect to be a successful ministry that serves others when you cannot work with others.⁵
2. Collaborate: Begin brainstorming with your ministry the ideas you have and what you would like your HIV/AIDS ministry to accomplish. Since you are working collectively, one person should not have the responsibility of coming up with all the ideas. Everyone involved in your HIV/AIDS ministry will have important contributions so each person should actively contribute their ideas.⁵

3. Develop a list of resources: work collectively with your ministry members and create a list of resources that your congregation has. Begin constructing multiple ideas regarding: a) what you plan to do, b) who you plan to serve, and c) how you will serve them.⁵
4. Create a list of possible mission statements: After considering the above mentioned items start working toward the development of your HIV ministry's mission statement. This, again, involves working collectively with each person in your ministry. Be open and respectful to all thought and ideas. Each person brings something that is unique. Remember the Golden Rule: "Treat others how you want to be treated."
5. Finalize and vote on your ministry's mission statement: Remove statements that do not capture the purpose of your ministry. Fine tune the wording as it should specifically speak to what you plan to do and who you plan to serve. While finalizing your statement, capture the thoughts of all and everyone can feel as if they have contributed something special. (The success of your ministry also relies on the inclusion of all those who are involved. If one person is overbearing then there will not be cohesion amongst the group and the ministry will not last).⁵
6. Enforce your mission statement: Put your mission statement to work by making sure your ministry does just what it said it would do. As times change you may also need to change your mission statement, so do not be afraid to alter your statement if there is a need to do so. It would also be a good idea to read your mission statement at each meeting you have, as it will remind you to keep the main thing the main thing.

In the resource section you will find links that will offer tips on how to create your mission/vision statements.



A vision statement, on the other hand, will vividly describe how the *mission* will be carried out, it will define where you want to be in the future.⁶

As a ministry, you may have decided your vision will be to reduce the incidence of HIV and AIDS in your community, which will then impact the greater world. In order to achieve the results your congregation is seeking, your ministry will want to create a detailed list of what will be needed to achieve the mission.



Assignment: Given the mission statement that is listed above, collaborate with your ministry to create a vision for how your mission will be carried out:

Important tips for HIV/AIDS ministries

Below are tips provided from established HIV/AIDS ministries:

- God loves all His people. Despite the consequences of risky behavior, He still loves all His people. As Christ has accepted us the way we are, we must also do that for our brothers and sisters who are living with HIV or AIDS or are at risk for HIV/AIDS.
- An HIV/AIDS ministry is no easy task. It takes hard work and determination.
- It takes responsibility and commitment to fulfill the task. You cannot start a ministry and then leave it on the line. You must continue with your purpose. Discuss with your ministry ways in which your mission statement can be maintained.
- You must have love and passion. It is also important to understand how fear and stigma fuels the AIDS epidemic and you must be fearless and take a stand against stigma.
- Leaders must be educated not only on the facts, but also educated on what it takes to keep your HIV/AIDS ministry successful.
- You must know the facts about HIV and AIDS. You cannot effectively educate others if you are unaware of the facts yourself. It is also important to know the truth from the myths. HIV cannot be spread by sharing a toilet with someone who is HIV-positive or by sharing eating utensils. Don't worry, if someone who is living with AIDS sneezes on you, you will not contract HIV.
- Everyone will have differing views and that is okay. However, it is important to remember what your mission is, and you must keep the main thing the main thing. If your mission is to decrease HIV in your community by providing condoms to your congregation and community then that is what you should focus on, not on the individuals in the church who are sexually active.
- Know who you are, and what you are capable of accomplishing. When you first begin your ministry, do not attempt to bite off more than you can chew.
- Build partnerships with other organizations and HIV/AIDS ministries that are working to fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic. There is power in numbers.

- Your ministry must be person-centered. Your ministry exists because of the people you serve and therefore that is what should be most important, especially when those in your ministry begin to debate controversial ideas and doctrines.
- In the past, you may have displayed a stigmatizing attitude toward anyone who has HIV/AIDS or who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ), but do not come down on yourself. Have mercy for yourself. Pray and ask for God's forgiveness, and also forgive yourself. This will increase your patience and willingness to work with others who are hindered by stigmatizing attitudes and fear.

ENDNOTES

1. WHO. Constitution of the World Health Organization, Geneva, 1946.
2. Jeremiah 30:17. The Holy Bible. King James Version
3. Fact Sheets: The Faith Community & HIV/AIDS and an Interfaith Declaration. Available at <http://www.thebody.com/content/art33118.html>
4. Basics of Developing Mission, Vision and Values Statements. Available at http://www.managementhelp.org/plan_dec/str_plan/stmnts.htm
5. Writing a Mission Statement: a Free how-to on creating a mission statement. Available at http://nonprofitmanagement.suite101.com/article.cfm/writing_a_mission_statement
6. Vision, mission and values. Available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strategic_planning