

A Message on . . .

AIDS and the Church's Ministry of Caring

In the presence of the human suffering, anxiety and tragedy in the AIDS crisis, we commit ourselves anew to the ministry of caring. The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America recognizes with gratitude the service of those who care for people with AIDS and their loved ones. It urges church members to support this ministry and to serve those who are suffering with respect and compassion.

AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome), often with an intensity greater than many diseases, calls us to remember our common humanity. The suffering of persons with AIDS demonstrates anew that life for all is vulnerable, limited, and broken, yet also graced with courage, hope and reconciliation. As a disease that affects women, men and children around the world, it shows how closely we are bound together in relationships of mutual trust, need and responsibility.

The church's ministry of caring is a grateful response to God's caring for us. The undeserved love of God announced for all in the Gospel of Jesus Christ is our reason for standing with our neighbor in need. Jesus responded graciously to persons who were sick without assessing their merit. In the same way we are called to "be Christs" for all in our midst who suffer and are ill. Our calling summons us to compassion for, acceptance of and service with people affected by AIDS both within and outside of our congregations.

This ministry of caring requires that we be well-informed about the nature of AIDS. We urge our members to read the Surgeon General's brochure "Understanding AIDS," and we encourage our congregations to discuss the subject in their educational programs. Knowledgeable and sensitive Christians are needed to help counter the prejudice and injurious discrimination that people with AIDS experience. Wise and informed people are needed to participate in the complex public policy debates surrounding the disease.

This ministry of caring challenges us to support efforts in the churches and in the wider community that serve those with AIDS, their friends and families. We will continue to encourage nurses, doctors, caregivers and pastors who witness to God's grace in their daily ministry with people with AIDS.

This ministry of caring embraces the hospitality of our congregational life, whose center is worship. There through Word and Sacrament the Holy Spirit offers to all the comfort and the hope of the victorious God of the cross. There persons who suffer come to know that they are not forgotten, since God cares. There we participate in the concerns and care of the sick through prayer, the laying on of hands and services of healing. United by baptism, all are invited to receive the touch of care. "Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Romans 15:7).

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