



*Office of Public Affairs*

## **World AIDS Day 2014**

Every year on December 1, Episcopalians and Lutherans join with people around the world to commemorate World AIDS Day. This day serves as a time to remember those whose lives were forever changed because of HIV and AIDS. It also offers an opportunity to recommit ourselves to building God's Kingdom by working to bring the AIDS pandemic to an end. This year, World AIDS Day falls on the second day of Advent, a time of hope and anticipation of the new life Jesus' birth brings. As does Advent, World AIDS Day invites us to live with the joy that is to come by continuing to lift up the vision of a new life free of HIV and AIDS.

Three decades ago when scientists first identified HIV as the cause of AIDS, contracting the virus was a death sentence. Treatment for the disease was nonexistent. Today, advancements in treatment make it possible for people with HIV to live long, fulfilling lives. Better prevention services are helping to slow down new infections. We acknowledge and celebrate this progress, but remain steadfast in the face of the great challenges that remain. The goal remains "Getting to zero: Zero new HIV infections. Zero discrimination. Zero AIDS related deaths."

In 2013, 2.1 million people became infected with HIV and 1.5 million people died from AIDS-related illnesses worldwide. Of the 35 million people currently living with HIV, only 13.6 million have access to antiretroviral medications. Furthermore, the stigma and discrimination toward those affected by HIV and AIDS continue to be a major problem in this struggle. Churches and other faith communities throughout the world are well suited to challenge social stigma associated with HIV and AIDS, and we pray for unity of purpose in this work among faith leaders everywhere.

Poverty and marginalization of vulnerable and key populations (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people, sex workers, people who inject drugs, prisoners, migrants, women and girls) are major contributors to the spread of HIV. Infection rates within these populations are disproportionately high, and yet few have access to life-saving treatment. Both The Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are committed to the fight against HIV and AIDS, and committed to working to end poverty both in our own communities and around the world. In the coming year we

will challenge our churches to find greater synergy between these two related Gospel imperatives. [We will also continue to encourage voluntary testing and counseling.](#)

Ensuring that all people living with HIV have access to prevention, care and treatment services must continue to be the focus of our HIV and AIDS ministries both here at home and abroad. We encourage Lutherans and Episcopalians everywhere to support efforts by our governments, churches and other partners to provide resources towards treatment, care and prevention services. We also challenge the Administration and Congress to increase funding for PEPFAR; the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria; and domestic programs that provide preventive care and treatment in the United States. We also urge governments to support the inclusion of the proposed target of ending the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria by 2030 in the United Nations' post-2015 development agenda.

“The Lord has anointed me...to provide for those who mourn,” writes the prophet Isaiah in a passage Episcopalians and Lutherans will hear this Advent, “to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.” This Advent, may we live these words with fervor and joy as we recommit to seeking a world without AIDS.

**The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori**  
**Presiding Bishop and Primate**  
**The Episcopal Church**

**The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton**  
**Presiding Bishop**  
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