Annual Council 1996 AIDS Guidelines

Annual Council action, October 7, 1996

H&T/ADCOM/GCDO96AC/96AC to LR(DIV)

201-96G THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH AND THE AIDS EPIDEMIC - GUIDELINES

VOTED, To approve The Seventh-day Adventist Church and the AIDS Epidemic - Guidelines, as follows:

The Seventh-day Adventist Church and the AIDS Epidemic - Guidelines

Rationale

The global epidemic of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) profoundly impacts the worldwide gospel mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Church leaders are called to respond through initiatives in education, prevention, and community service, and through personal acts of kindness to persons and families involved in the crisis. AIDS is no respecter of national boundaries, church membership, gender, marital status, education, income, or position in life. In many countries of the world, it is decimating the population, taking the lives of many individuals, including Seventh-day Adventist Church members. All persons, especially young people growing up in an era of moral laxity, need to be taught biblical principles regarding sexuality and God's design that sexual intimacy be experienced within the protection of the marriage covenant. Leadership should provide credible information to members - presented in their own language and sensitive to their own culture. The Church is called to be both a prophetic and a compassionate voice - the mouthpiece and hands of God as it extends the ministry of Christ into the community.

The global mission of the Church, in reaching out to all races and peoples, draws into church fellowship many who are infected by the AIDS virus prior to joining the church or who are affected by having family members with AIDS. The epidemic is of such magnitude that no family will ultimately remain untouched. Many are infected through no action of their own. A judgmental attitude is always inappropriate, especially since the source of the infection cannot be determined with certainty. Many have experienced shame, fear, and agony as family members suffered and died with AIDS, often feeling compelled to secrecy regarding their painful situation. Just as Christ came to offer healing to a suffering world, so Seventh-day Adventists are commissioned to compassionately care for those who suffer and are affected with the virus of AIDS. Members can safely serve as care givers, at home or in health care facilities, if they are educated in appropriate ways of doing so.

Recommendations

The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes its Christian responsibility to respond to the global AIDS crisis and the devastating effect on humanity and wishes to respond in multiple ways which include:

1. Extending the teaching and healing ministry of Christ, who without prejudice cared for all in need, by engaging in efforts to reduce the risk of individuals acquiring AIDS, and compassionately and non-judgmentally caring for all those affected when an individual suffers from AIDS.

2. Designating a person in each division, along with such personnel and financial resources as may be secured, to respond to AIDS challenges through appropriate initiatives and cooperative efforts with other entities in the community or country at large.

3. Developing and managing AIDS education programs using the resource HIV/AIDS Guide when applicable. Programs should be contextualized for relevant cultural and linguistic needs and directed to:
a. Pastors: Continuing education and ministerial meetings should be designed to equip pastors to deal with members touched by the AIDS crisis. Pastors need information on prevention, compassionate ministry, and applied ecclesiastical functions such as conducting a funeral service for a person whose death was the result of being infected with AIDS.

b. Teachers: Continuing education and in-service training should be offered with emphasis on conveying spiritual values and developing skills among youth for coping with sexual pressures.

c. Parents: Encouragement needs to be given to model a lifestyle that upholds Christian values, recognizing that poor marriage relations and any use of alcohol or other abusive substances has a direct negative effect on their children's sexual values and practices.

d. Church members: Sermons, Sabbath School Bible Study Guides, premarital counseling and marriage-strengthening activities, seminars regarding AIDS, and educational curricula are avenues for providing information regarding sexuality in general and AIDS in particular.

e. Communities: The Church needs to recognize the opportunity for Christian witness and ministry in the community at large, providing appropriate community outreach, and participating in cooperative endeavors.

4. Protecting and strengthening marriage by:

a. Upholding the ideal of abstinence from premarital sex.

b. Advocating premarital HIV testing for both potential partners as part of the church-based preparation for marriage.

c. Elevating God's ideal for fidelity in marriage.

d. Recommending protective measures against sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.

5. Intentionally transmitting Christian values to the next generation, recognizing that individual sexual values are established in youth. Priority should be given to providing accurate information, a forum for open discussion, and emphasis on the moral dimension of decision making regarding sexuality.