

God's People Are Tested



An Open Pastoral Letter to the Residents of Washington, DC:

Washington, DC is facing a crisis. According to a recent report from the District of Columbia government, at least 3% of DC residents age 12 or older are living with HIV or AIDS, an epidemic that rivals infection rates in countries considered to be severely affected by this disease.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic affects us all. Rather than acknowledging that impact, too often the church has shied away from confronting HIV/AIDS – including the fact that many of our members and their loved ones are HIV positive or are living with AIDS.

Today, we declare our commitment to tackle the stigma and discrimination associated with HIV/AIDS and to educate our congregations on the importance of HIV testing.

We believe the church – its pastors, lay leaders, and members – is called by Jesus Christ to care for each other and for all in our community affected and infected by HIV. To that end, we commit to:

- Extend our love, support, and compassion to all, especially those living with HIV/AIDS;
- Eliminate the stigma associated with those who are living with HIV/AIDS;
- Generate open dialogue in our congregations in order to make our churches safe places to talk about HIV/AIDS;
- Challenge our members to closely examine any fears or misperceptions of HIV/AIDS that we harbor; and to
- Encourage our members to be tested for HIV.

Caring for those who are sick and suffering is an issue that is close to the heart of God. By making these commitments we are witnessing to God's love and challenging the clergy and the church to help overcome the HIV/AIDS epidemic in our community.

Signed,