
From Conversation to Action

The intention of this book is to share the thoughts that emerged from the global theological consultation on HIV prevention that took place in Johannesburg in January 2008, and to invite other Christians into the conversation that took place then. It is not part of the book's purpose to prescribe to people what they should do or think. Nevertheless, participants themselves found that just talking about the issue was not enough. On the contrary, the process of 'doing' the theology was calling them to move beyond mere talk and into action and deeper commitment.

Part Three, therefore, sets out some practical consequences that might flow from these discussions, relating to the three themes around which these reflections are grouped, namely HIV prevention at global/national, community, and individual/interpersonal levels. These 'calls to action' are offered here in the belief that some readers will find it helpful to know what others have thought, even if a particular action is not something they would consider appropriate for them.

Finally, in this section, we suggest a range of different resources that readers might find useful in their own work, whether this is administration, grassroots pastoral activity or theological research. We apologize if there are glaring omissions: in a fast-moving field like AIDS, no list of this kind will ever be complete. We offer these, and everything else in this book, in the hope that the conversations that took place in Johannesburg, between one particular group of theologians, are only the beginning of a process of dialogue that will enable churches worldwide to engage in a more loving, trusting and open way with the theological and ethical challenges of HIV prevention.

1. HIV PREVENTION AT GLOBAL AND NATIONAL LEVELS

At global and national levels, Christians are called to action:

- a. to engage in global advocacy on key HIV prevention issues, such as universal access, patenting and pricing of medicines, research and development of new prevention technologies, stigma eradication, protection of the human rights of people living with HIV, increased and sustainable funding for AIDS response, strong and accountable political leadership, and long-term planning.
- b. to act collaboratively with people living with HIV, women's groups, and marginalized communities to plan and implement effective evidence-informed prevention programs for HIV;
- c. to address the structural inequalities in Church and society that continue to drive the HIV pandemic, with a particular focus on gender inequalities, global conflicts and violence, stigmatization of marginalized populations, and poverty and social injustice;
- d. to engage in effective advocacy by creating partnerships and alliances with civil society and faith communities;
- e. to participate in suitable movements of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and faith-based organizations (FBOs).

2. HIV PREVENTION AT COMMUNITY LEVEL

At community and congregational level, Christians are called to action:

- a. to organise studies and workshops to review their role in challenging community-level socio-cultural realities that put children, women and men at risk of HIV infection;
- b. to help people to explore their own life situation in the light of their personal vulnerability to HIV;
- c. to enable congregations to hear the stories of people infected with HIV, as this often leads to significant attitude change;
- d. to sponsor activities and retreats enabling church members to overcome their fear of people living with HIV, and also to develop churches as safe places for people living with HIV to declare their HIV status;
- e. to provide a range of services, both spiritual and practical, led by people living with HIV. In addition to care and treatment, this should include prayer, voluntary testing and counselling, teaching on sex and sexuality, HIV prevention and general HIV education for church members to increase knowledge and decrease stigma;
- f. to equip clergy for counselling in the context of the HIV epidemic, ensuring that marriage counselling creates an atmosphere of openness about sexual, emotional and physical needs, and also encourages people to recognize the risks of following temptations outside of marriage;

- g. to develop appropriate language for discussing, in church, sex, sexuality and those cultural norms and practices which put people at risk of HIV infection;
- h. to find acceptable ways of exploring community understandings of masculinity and femininity, and where these place women and men, girls and boys at risk, and to provide a supportive context for changed attitudes and behaviour;
- i. to provide grief counselling and practical support with networks of bereaved persons and people living with HIV, including orphaned children and widows;
- j. to provide information about local availability of information, activities, and also of reliable HIV prevention resources, education and counselling;
- k. to encourage the formation of youth peer groups for accurate learning on HIV prevention, sexuality and gender relations; train youth peer educators;
- l. to prioritise, welcome, work with and listen to individuals and groups who may feel excluded from full acceptance by the Church or their own churches;
- m. to oppose all forms of HIV-related stigma and discrimination through the resolution of church leaders and their communities to incorporate the many gifts that people affected by HIV can bring to their communities;
- n. to put in place policies of non-discrimination, in (for example) any published material they publish, in employment policies, and in processes of appointing volunteers to roles within church activities.

3. HIV PREVENTION AT THE LEVEL OF INDIVIDUALS

At the level of individuals, Christians are called to action:

- a. to equip every church member with accurate, comprehensive and up to date information about HIV prevention and where to access services for HIV prevention locally;
- b. to encourage church members to take up voluntary counselling and HIV testing, and pastors and church to encourage groups from the church to go together to the local VCT centre to be tested;
- c. to teach HIV prevention and positive living;
- d. to encourage people living with HIV within the faith community to take a lead in programmes related to HIV;
- e. to take responsibility for challenging and addressing cultural practices that increase people's vulnerability to HIV infection;
- f. to promote behaviour change in order to help people avoid risk;
- g. to act in solidarity with people living with HIV in the effort to counteract stigma;
- h. to challenge HIV-related or wider stigma within an individual's working, educational, social and faith-based areas of influence or engagement;
- i. to recognize self-stigma, in oneself or in others, and to try to overcome it.

Resources

1. UNAIDS resources

UNAIDS is generally acknowledged to be the most authoritative source of information on many aspects of the AIDS pandemic. Its website offers free and immediate access to the latest statistical data as well as a wealth of information on priorities, strategy and good practice. <http://www.unaids.org>

Prevention web-pages

UNAIDS prevention web-pages provide a wide range of information on HIV prevention. Pages under this section each carry specific tools, guidelines or resources appropriate to the topic in the side panel on the right. Some general guides are listed below, more specific information can be found on each page. <http://www.unaids.org/en/PolicyAndPractice/Prevention/default.asp>

Intensifying HIV Prevention: UNAIDS Policy Position Paper (2005)

http://www.unaids.org/en/KnowledgeCentre/Resources/PolicyGuidance/UmbrellaPolicies/Prevention_Umbrella_Policies.asp

Practical Guidelines for Intensifying HIV Prevention (2007)

http://www.unaids.org/en/KnowledgeCentre/Resources/PolicyGuidance/OperationGuidelines/HIV_prev_operational_guidelines.asp

A Framework for Classifying HIV Prevention Interventions

http://data.unaids.org/pub/Report/2008/20080123_framework_for_classifying_prev_interventions_en.pdf

Developing Minimum Quality Standards for HIV Prevention Interventions

http://data.unaids.org/pub/Report/2008/20080214_developing_quality_standards_for_hiv_prevention_en.pdf

A Framework for Monitoring and Evaluating HIV Prevention Programmes for Most-At-Risk Populations

http://data.unaids.org/pub/Manual/2007/20070420_me_of_prevention_in_most_at_risk_populations_en.pdf

2. Some indispensable websites

CABSA (Capacity Building for Churches and Faith-Based Organizations in Southern Africa)

This website helps access a wide range of up-to-date resources for churches and other faith congregations – not just in Southern Africa.

<http://www.cabsa.co.za>, see particularly <http://www.cabsa.co.za/newsite/DisplayPage.asp?Id=97>

CAFOD (Catholic Fund for Overseas Development)

CAFOD has long experience in the field of HIV prevention and produces some excellent resources. *<http://www.cafod.org.uk/hiv-and-aids>*

<http://www.cafod.org.uk/worship/hiv-and-health>

Caritas Internationalis

The Caritas website is an up-to-date and authoritative source of information on Catholic activities, initiatives and publications.

http://www.caritas.org/activities/hiv_aids/index.html

http://www.caritas.org/activities/hiv_aids/sinethemba_a_caritas_response_to_aids.html?cntId=463

The Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA)

The EAA's website has a huge collection of resources, articles, activities and training materials on HIV and AIDS. *<http://www.e-alliance.ch>*

The Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA)

EHAIA provides a unique lens on the response of churches in Africa to the HIV epidemic. EHAIA has developed resources, technical tools, training materials and theological education materials.

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation/ehaia.html>

International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) publishes excellent research and action tools on women in the epidemic.

<http://www.icrw.org/html/library/library.htm>

Strategies for Hope publishes educational and training materials, including the widely-used *Stepping Stones* and the *Called to Care* series.

<http://www.stratshope.org>

Tearfund provides solid research and campaign materials through its wide Christian network. www.tearfund.org

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has a useful website, with stories and articles on a wide variety of faith-based initiatives supported by UNICEF. <http://www.unicef.org/aids>

World AIDS Day (WAD) The World AIDS Campaign, which oversees World AIDS Day, carries invaluable educational, campaigning, advocacy and activity ideas for use on or around World AIDS Day, which falls on 1st December every year. <http://www.worldaidscampaign.org>

World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP): Especially *Combating Stigma and Discrimination: The Role of Religion in Building Inclusive Communities Responding to HIV & AIDS* which is a CD-ROM carrying a wide range of resources (published in collaboration with EAA):
<http://www.wcrp.org/resources/media/stigma>

World Council of Churches (WCC). WCC has a longstanding involvement with HIV and AIDS, close relationships with regional councils of churches, and a wide-ranging collection of books, publications, workshop tools and policy statements from churches.

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation/ehaia/declarations-and-policy-statements-on-hiv-aids-by-churches-and-faith-based-organisations-2001-2005.html>

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About the Editor

Dr Gillian Paterson is a consultant and writer. Her many books and articles on HIV and AIDS include *AIDS Related Stigma: Thinking outside the box - the theological challenge* (EAA/WCC 2005), *AIDS and the African Churches* (Christian Aid 2001) and *Love in a Time of AIDS* (WCC 1995 and Orbis 1996). She is currently a research fellow at Heythrop College, University of London.

HIV Prevention: A Global Theological Conversation

HIV transmission is preventable. HIV and AIDS are treatable. Yet for every two people starting on treatments, five more become infected. Faith groups, which are close to communities and their members, should be ideally placed to engage with issues of HIV prevention. Too often, though, the prevention messages coming from organized religion have been ambivalent, moralistic, stigmatizing, or divorced from the realities of people's lives. What is it about HIV prevention that causes some Christians to spend more time disagreeing with each other than developing sensible, achievable responses? And what can we do about it?

Wide-ranging, open and accessible, this landmark publication addresses these questions head-on.

"Every church leader, pastor, preacher, theologian, should take the first step towards joining A Global Theological Conversation by reading this groundbreaking new volume on HIV prevention. Then take the second step...begin your own theological reflection and engage others in the discourse of life."

— Archbishop Desmond Tutu

"In many ways this volume is a model for inter-church dialogue. This 'conversation' explored in a loving and enlightening way one of the most difficult challenges of the AIDS pandemic, that of prevention. Respect for difference was maintained while the growing convergence in theology and practices, rather than pseudo-consensus, was the aim. The results were so encouraging that the model might well be adopted for other profound challenges facing churches, religions and the world."

— Enda McDonagh, Emeritus Professor of Moral Theology,
Pontifical Faculty, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Co. Kildare, Ireland

"If the church is serious about its core business, saving people's lives, it is important for the body of Christ to have access to wholistic, contextual and theologically based prevention strategies. This book is a gem and contains a wealth of theological reflections that will empower churches in different contexts to respond appropriately."

— Rev. Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela, Chief Executive Officer,
KwaZulu-Natal Christian Council

"These theological reflections on HIV prevention are an important start, and I hope others will take this book as the foundation for conversations and actions that overcome silence and stigma and fulfill the positive role faith can have in communities responding to HIV and AIDS."

— Sigrun Møgedal, Ambassador, HIV/AIDS and Global Health Initiatives, Norway

"This is a crucial conversation on HIV prevention by religious leaders and theologians, grounded by the experience of people living with HIV and those working directly with communities affected by AIDS. The more religious communities can openly and respectfully discuss the faith and realities that effective HIV prevention has to address, the more progress we can make in reducing the spread of HIV and envisioning a world without AIDS."

— Michel Sidibé,
Executive Director, UNAIDS

