Advent is a season of hope and expectation set amidst the poverty, violence and injustice of the world. Since AIDS was identified in the early 1980s, the joy of Advent has contrasted sharply with the suffering of people living with or affected by HIV and the deaths of over 27 million people due to AIDS related illnesses. Over these decades we have learned that everyone is affected by AIDS, and our calling as Christians demands leadership in demonstrating love, compassion and practical support to all in need.

This is also a time of real hope. Medical advances mean that people living with HIV can live full lives. Comprehensive prevention approaches are known. The inclusion of people living with HIV at all levels of the response has helped to make our words and actions more caring and effective.

Promises by world leaders have also given hope that over the next several years concerted efforts by all levels of society will bring universal access to treatment, care, and prevention. Yet we wait for these promises to be fulfilled. The Keep the Promise campaign of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance and wider civil society calls on all leaders – and all of us – to be accountable to the promises we have made and fulfill the hope of life for millions of people around the world.

The Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance is an international network of over 100 churches and Christian organizations committed to joint advocacy on HIV and AIDS as well as on global trade. We invite you to use this devotional resource from World AIDS Day to Christmas, whether celebrated in Western or Eastern traditions. The reflections can be used as individual devotions or to initiate group discussion or prayer. May our prayers then be the foundation for action to keep our promises, and hold others to theirs, so that future generations will not live in a time of AIDS.

You may download or share electronic copies of this calendar in English, French and Spanish at: www.e-alliance.ch. A limited number of printed copies (English) are available and may be ordered from: info@e-alliance.ch
These words were first addressed to the Israelites in Babylonian exile. There they were ostracized and discriminated against as aliens. It seemed as if their God had abandoned them, or was much weaker than the Babylonian gods with their imposing temples. How wonderful, how utterly unbelievable then to hear the prophet, God’s spokesperson, cry out exultingly: “Comfort, O comfort my people…” Their God had not abandoned them; their God was not impotent; God would intervene decisively on their behalf to lead them back home.

How fitting are these words for World AIDS Day – when we think of the many millions living with HIV and AIDS who have been similarly stigmatized and discriminated against like those exiles of old. Take heart. God has not abandoned you. God intervenes on your behalf. God loves you. You are precious to God who reminds governments to “Keep the Promise” of universal access to treatment, and to outlaw discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS. Wonderful God, be praised.

Thank you, God, that we are all precious in your sight. Bless all seeking a vaccine and all who care for the sick, filling them with hope. Comfort them all for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu was the first black General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 and the Ghandi Peace Prize in 2007.
Keep Awake, Keep Watch

Matthew 24:36-44
Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. (v. 42)

“Keeping Awake” and “Keeping Watch” are critical life and leadership skills.

Jesus did not wish his hearers to have sleepless nights but to develop life and leadership skills that effectively grasp and handle life’s assignments – skills that build accountability for progress and impact, any time that it is demanded by the One who gave the assignments.

Life in our world is replete with unexpected circumstances and twists. These include our inability to know exactly when, how, and by whom we may be called to account for the promises we have made to others – at an individual, family, local community, national or global level. The Master Teacher used this “Divine Visitation” story to caution us against providing “correct answers to wrong questions.” In the context of HIV and AIDS, this is not easy. It requires watching, listening, praying, and doing things that address the root causes of vulnerability, injustice, selfishness, and deprivation.

Lord God, help us to keep awake, since we do not know on what day, in what form or in what circumstance of life you will come. Amen.

Rev. Canon Gideon Byamugisha is an Anglican priest in The Diocese of Namirembe, Kampala (Uganda) and a founding member of the African Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected by HIV and AIDS (ANERELA+).
Hope to Hold Onto

**Romans 13:11-14**

*For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers.* (v. 11b)

People whose lives have been touched by HIV and AIDS are desperately in need of hope. Hope for access to good medical treatment and life-saving medication. Hope for being surrounded by a caring community who will offer support. But most of all, hope that this life is not all there is – that there is a better world waiting for all who have put their trust in God’s gift of salvation.

Each day that passes brings us one step closer to finally receiving all that has been promised to us. Even in our brokenness, we know that one day all sorrow, sadness, and sickness will be over. These bodies that are so weak now will be restored to full health, and joy will return. That’s a hope to hold onto!

*God of all hope, help us to hold on to the promise of your salvation. Amen.*

Kay Warren is the Executive Director of the HIV/AIDS Initiative at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, USA.
Wider and Inclusive Perspective

Isaiah 2:2-4
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord... that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” (v. 3b)

Going up to a mountain gives us a wider perspective. Going up to the mountain of the Lord, we can share God’s perspective. We are invited to be part of God’s compassionate solidarity. Walking in the paths of God’s justice, we also strive to become truly inclusive communities.

Sometimes, public policies can also play a very effective role in promoting solidarity and inclusivity. In Brazil, HIV and AIDS is the focus of many of such policies – both prevention and treatment are provided without any cost to citizens. Based on World Trade Organization rules, the government decided to bypass the patent on an AIDS drug, manufactured by a U.S. pharmaceutical giant, after attempts to negotiate a substantial price reduction were unsuccessful. A generic drug is now being imported from India.

In many places around the world Christians are engaged in projects preventing HIV and AIDS and in offering support to those affected.

Our God, in your grace, transform us into compassionate people striving towards being a caring and truly inclusive community. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Walter Altmann is the President of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil and Moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches.

December 4
Advent is a time to prepare our lives once again to celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, coming into our hearts and into our broken world. We prepare for this birth in the midst of war, conflict, and division, not only “out there” in the world, but also in our own communities, in our own hearts.

Conflicts and wars, great and small alike, require so many resources – not only money and materials, but time and talent. These resources diverted away from the world’s poorest, prevent us from keeping our promises to ensure access to HIV prevention and treatment for all. Yet God reminds us this Advent of the choices we each can make – to turn from war and conflict, to life and peace.

Ob God of Healing, help me to see the swords and spears in my life and turn these into life for people with HIV and AIDS. Amen.

Rev. Richard Bauer is the Executive Director of Catholic AIDS Action in Windhoek, Namibia.
Psalm 122
“Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers.” (v. 7)

What does praying for peace mean?

Psalm 122 was a song of praise sung by pilgrims to Jerusalem. It is also a peace prayer. Praying for peace means channeling God’s peace as one lives in multiracial, multi-religious places such as Jerusalem or Bangkok. Praying for security means asking for a safe and abundant life.

When walls divide lands and peoples, we urgently need to pray and work for genuine peace. Praying for peace – locally or globally – is an act of faith. For our peace to be complete, we must attend to the well-being of others, particularly people living with HIV and AIDS. God blesses peacemakers.

Healing God, enable us to embody peace daily. Grant us wisdom in keeping the promise for the well-being and security of all. Amen.

Rev. Elizabeth S. Tapia is a theologian and educator from the Philippines, who currently directs the Center for Study of Christianities in Global Context, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey, USA.
Peace Within

Psalm 122
For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, “Peace be within you.” (v:8)

Many women find themselves in supportive caretaking roles. They fulfill these roles with commitment for the sake of the peace and welfare of their families and friends. My mother curtailed her profession as nurse quite early in her career in order to devote her life to caring for her children, and the sick and elderly of our family and community. Women as mothers, grandmothers, wives, sisters, and daughters continue to provide care for their relatives and friends. Now more than ever, with the impact of the AIDS pandemic, caretaking becomes urgent and essential. But who takes care of caretakers?

It requires courage and strength and inner peace to deny self for the sake of others. Prophetic peacemaking is about having peace within and becoming co-creators of the peace dreamed of by God. Peacemaking begins with us and those closest to us. Peace within has the potential of exuding peace without. To care for others with dignity, and to care for people living with HIV or dying from AIDS-related illness requires peace within.

Lord, let us see in each person, a brother or sister, a mother or father, a son or daughter, a husband or wife. Let us see in the diversity of cultures, the community of people created in your image. Lord, make us instruments of your peace in this era of HIV and AIDS. Amen.

Dr. Musimbi Kanyoro is a theologian and former General Secretary of the World YWCA.
Life Prevails Over Death!

Psalm 122
For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good. (v. 9)

The psalmist paints a wholistic picture of Jerusalem that houses both the praises and the judgement. When we read about the poor widow who gave her last coins in the temple treasury (Mark 12:41-44), we realize that the temple was a headquarters of corruption; yet the widow regarded it as God’s dwelling place.

People like me, who are positively living with HIV, have chosen to use their diagnosis as an opportunity to re-evaluate their lives. This has encouraged us to be more grateful each day and to be a living witness. This has amended the sting of HIV and AIDS. The challenge is to choose – as for the psalmist – to look for the good in the midst of all the negativity and the prophecies of doom!

Our loving God, open our eyes. Teach us to claim life where death abounds! Amen.

Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela is the Chief Executive Officer of the KwaZulu-Natal Christian Council (KZNCC) in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

December 8
God Comes to Us in the Wilderness

Matthew 3:1-12
The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’ (v. 3b)

Most people know how it feels to be lost in the wilderness. The landscape is bleak, and it is impossible to find your bearings. You are cut off from all that sustains life and hope. There is no food, no water, and no gentle touch or voice to assure you that you are not alone.

During this Advent season we are particularly aware of the many wilderness places in our lives: the aching isolation of shame; children without parents; too few medicines and over-stretched medical facilities; the fear of difficult death; the agony of losing those you love too soon.

It is precisely in the wilderness places of our lives that God makes God’s home with us. God comes to us to prepare the way, claiming us for life, and leading us into community and justice.

Gracious God, we give you thanks that you come to us, even in the wilderness. Especially in the wilderness. Amen.

Rev. Mark S. Hanson is Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and President of The Lutheran World Federation.

December 9
The Justice of God

Psalm 72:1-7 & 18-19
May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. (v. 2)

In many courts of law, especially in the western world, JUSTICE is depicted as a blindfolded woman holding scales in one hand and a sword in the other. This image proudly conveys the message that blind justice treats people as equals, without partiality, and this is what safeguards the rule of law in modern democracies. But is it really just to treat unequals equally? Does this not perpetuate inequality?

In contrast to blind justice, biblical justice is open-eyed with hands outstretched to those oppressed and in need. The writer of Psalm 72 appeals to King Solomon to practice God’s justice, knowing that divine justice (Shalom) is not about maintaining order and balance in the interests of the powerful, but of righting wrongs and transforming relationships in the interests of the oppressed. Many rulers, like Solomon before them, dispense blind justice and rough justice rather than rising to the vision of Shalom.

Gracious God, let your justice be done – in us, through us and in spite of us. Amen.

Rev. Myra Blyth is the Chaplain and Fellow in Worship and Pastoral Studies at Regent’s Park College, University of Oxford, UK.

December 10
HIV and AIDS have sent out roots in the dry soil — of death, of silence, of injustice and poverty, of exclusion, fear and indifference. It would seem that hope will not grow in the dead earth. The dead earth embraces us, darkens the horizon, and kills. But little by little in silence, the love of God can be felt. Like dew that love slowly settles on our hearts — it refreshes and embraces.

We have been called upon to be living rain in the love of the Father. Our solidarity, our love, the cry for justice are drops of life which God sheds on our world lashed by HIV and AIDS. The presence of God gives shape to a roaring flow of solidarity, justice, and inclusion, which soak the dry earth and transform it into fertile land from which new sprouts of hope spring forth.

The birth of Jesus renews the calling to remain committed to being builders of life and hope.

Father, in your presence may your son be the live rain of peace, love, and justice, especially for our brothers and sisters who are living with HIV and AIDS. Amen.

Hernán Quezada Sj., MD., is a physician, Jesuit, and theology student in Iberoamericana University México. He is Special Advisor on HIV and AIDS to Caritas México. Translated by Cathleen Pomaski

December 11
God Does Not Abandon Us

Romans 15:4-13
May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus. (v. 5)

On December 21, 1990, our oldest son, Tim, died from the complications of AIDS. Nine months later, on September 20, 1991, our middle son, Fred, also succumbed to the ravages of AIDS. The loss of two sons in such a short time devastated us. In the months following their deaths we experienced depression and questioned why this had happened to us. We found an outlet by letting tears flow, in talking about Tim and Fred to good friends, and by praying many times a day.

God encouraged us and gave us strength to be in ministry to others who find it difficult to carry their sorrows. Our experience comes through God whose own Son died to bring healing and wholeness to all of God’s people.

Gracious God, continue to bless us with your outpouring love. Amen.

Bishop Fritz and Etta Mae Mutti are the coordinators of the United Methodist Global AIDS Fund, New York, USA.

December 12
Welcome One Another

Romans 15:4-13
Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. (v. 7)

On the day of my HIV diagnosis I shared the bad news with my girlfriend. I was scared that she would walk out on me and sever our relationship. She said, however, “I loved you before you became HIV positive. The fact that you have a virus doesn’t change the love I have for you. God brought us together, and I am not going to leave you now that you are HIV positive.” We have been married now for nineteen years.

This is what God calls each one of us to do. We must fight the stigma that is still associated with HIV and AIDS by changing our language. It must not be a language of blame and judgment, but a language of acceptance. In this way we will be true followers of Christ. Jesus Christ accepted us despite of what or who we are. Through our love and acceptance God will be glorified.

Our gracious Father, help me to accept others just as you have accepted me. Help me to reach out with your love. Amen.

Rev. Christo Greyling has been HIV positive since 1987 and works for World Vision International as advisor on HIV and AIDS, and Faith Partnerships based in South Africa.

December 13
Isaiah 11:1-10
But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. (v. 4a)

When I first thought of going for an HIV test I was afraid that if tested positive, I would be rejected by other faith leaders. Encouraged by the Word of God, I realized that my worth as a person was not in my fellow human’s perception of how they viewed me but in the value placed on me by a just God.

In light of HIV and AIDS, people have a tendency of focusing on how people think of them. They forget that there is a God who deals with us fairly in spite of who we are or our situation. A person’s worth is embedded in the truth that he/she was created in God’s image.

Dear Lord, help us to see others through your loving eyes and appreciate them as you do. Amen.

Rev. Annie Kaseketi is a minister of the Word of God living with HIV and currently working with World Vision Zambia.
Isaiah 11:1-10
They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain. (v. 9a)

Here we read of the kingdom of God, where peace is possible, and the animals that were once enemies now lie down together. This passage is often read as a prophecy about Christ – as the figure who appears with “the spirit of wisdom and understanding” resting on him. He embodies righteousness, faithfulness, justice, equity and truth. He does not judge by outward appearance.

In our world, people are hurt and harmed every day. There are women, men, and young people in families and communities who are vulnerable – exposed to HIV and misjudged.

Let us “Keep the Promise” by helping those we love and ourselves to be less vulnerable, and more confident to live with hope. May we accept each other – for Christ has opened the kingdom of God for everyone.

Lord, help me to live today in your protection and your peace. Amen.

Alison Rader Campbell is a former consultant for HIV and Community Development at The Salvation Army International Headquarters Health Services in London, UK.
For Whom Are You Waiting?

Matthew 11:2-11

“Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” (v. 3)

When an opportunity arises to speak out or to make a decision that will change many things, many of us hesitate. Is this the right time to speak? Is this when I am supposed to act? We want all of the pieces in place before we risk speaking or acting. We need some assurance, somewhere to place our trust.

John the Baptist needed assurance from Jesus too – “Are you the one we are to follow?” Jesus’ response is wonderful! He asks the disciples to tell John what they see and hear: the lame walk, the deaf hear, lepers are cleansed, and good news shared. Jesus broke down stigmas and responded to people in need of love and healing. He spoke out against injustices and offered a new way of life. As disciples in this time of HIV and AIDS, the call to see, hear, and respond is ours as well. We have Jesus’ Word. The time is Now.

Loving Jesus, I ask for the courage to speak and to act. Amen.

Sister Maria Cimperman OSU, is Assistant Professor of Moral Theology and Social Ethics at the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas, USA.

December 16
When Trust is Caring

Matthew 11:2-11
Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see." (v. 4)

When I got my HIV-positive result in 1987 time stopped and my existence fell apart. I was 30 years old and in the middle of a dynamic life. Studies and interesting work assignments succeeded one another. I had just arrived home from Saudi Arabia after a period of time working with physically handicapped children and youth. Facing my future, nothing seemed impossible.

The news of my HIV-positive status cast me into darkness – but I reached into my personal foundation and discovered that I had trust in people and in God. This trust made me safe, and led me step by step to the only possibility – openness – a freedom to deal candidly with my situation.

Twenty years have passed and I know that what I have seen and heard will carry me through. In Jesus Christ, God has given humankind a future, a hope, and the knowledge that we are unique. Guilt and shame are corrosive, but these deeply human feelings can be eliminated in a trusting community between people and God.

God, give us the strength to be open whatever our circumstances. Amen.

Steve Sjöquist is an author and lecturer in Stockholm, Sweden.

December 17
Come What May

Psalm 146:5-10
Happy are those whose hope is in the Lord their God. (v. 5)

“God knows my pain. Jesus’ body has felt all the pain and embarrassment that any human has ever experienced. Jesus carried all our disease, pain, and contempt. Because of this He knows what this is all about. He knows my feelings and He knows my heart. He is raging when human dignity is injured. That kind of rage can only be provoked by the strongest love there is – the rage that occurs when those we love most are hurt or injured in any way.”

These words were spoken to me by a good friend while she was drying my tears. She had just told me that she was living with AIDS. Not too long ago, she left this world and entered another, but her words still conjure up the most powerful image of God that I know – the image of a God that knows all pain and loves us so much that we find strength in His rage, comfort in His understanding, and love to keep us safe come what may.

Gracious God, thank you for giving us hope beyond our understanding. Help us to trust it and to lean on it throughout our lives. Amen.

Lene Hopland Bergset is a theology student and an engaged volunteer in Changemaker, Norway.
Her teacher raped her. She became a mother at sixteen. She is a widow, unemployed and rearing five grandchildren, two of them HIV positive. She has known the burden of patriarchy. She has learned not to wait for powerful governments and greedy rulers for help. Like the psalmist she has been bowed down many times by great loss and grief. She cries out in shouts of lament, thanksgiving, and incomprehensible hope. She knows her help will only come by trusting in the living God. Providentially she believes justice comes with the one of whom it is written: “a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench” (Isaiah 42:3a).

Faithfulness and fruitfulness is her testimony. Africa is lifted up because this grandmother has refused to give up. She is the blessed mother of the motherless and the despairing. Her daily activities are punctuated with songs and prayers. Glory be to God.

Compassionate God, thank you for all grandmothers of Africa who testify that there is life after HIV and AIDS. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Nyambura Njoroge is the co-ordinator of Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA) based in Geneva, Switzerland.
Psalm 146:5-10
The LORD watches over the strangers; be upholds the orphan and the widow. (v. 9)

Being an HIV positive activist, I have seen so much pain, death, and burials. Sometimes I wonder: “Where is God?”
If I did not believe that God will bring justice and protect the orphan, the widow, and the stranger, I would die of sadness. Sometimes I am exhausted, and feel my work is ineffective, while more women and children die.
I asked God about this. The answer came – I am God’s hands in this world; that this epidemic is an opportunity to show God’s love and to preach the gospel. God – our help, our hope, and our justice – will uphold the widow and the orphan.

Gracious God, use me as an instrument of your justice. Help me to “Keep the Promise.” I want to stand up for the stranger, the prisoner, the blind, the orphan, and the widow. Amen.

Gracia Violeta Ross is a Christian HIV positive activist in La Paz, Bolivia.
Ten years ago, when I was preparing to die from HIV and AIDS, I asked my parents to talk about my funeral. They didn’t want to discuss this possibility. My father said, “Son, you shouldn’t give up hope. They might find something.”

I said, “Dad, we can’t be in denial. They’re not going to find anything to help me.” As a well-read AIDS worker I believed my situation was hopeless. My father, who hadn’t read much about HIV and AIDS, but knew my diagnosis, had never given up hope.

That was more than a decade ago. A few months later, thanks to God, scientific research, and the efforts of HIV and AIDS activists, I was able to start taking the treatments that have sustained my life to this day.

O Spirit of all hope, teach our hearts and minds of your unending constancy. Amen.

Rev. Ralph Carl Wushke is minister at Bathurst United Church in Toronto, Canada.
We Are All Wet

Isaiah 35:1-10
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. (v. 6b)

There are days when we need to be reminded that God is powerful and surprising. Isaiah tells us that God can make the deserts bloom, make living waters flow in dry lands, bring joy, and make sorrow and sighing “flee away.” The challenges of HIV and AIDS call for a powerful and surprising God.

And, there are even more days when we need to be reminded that God works through each of us. Through the waters of baptism we are called to be those “streams in the desert” for others. If I am living with HIV or AIDS, I can share my experience, strength, and hope. If someone close to me is living with HIV or AIDS, I can provide reassurance of my ongoing presence on the journey. And, if I have voice, vote, money or influence, I too, can commit to keeping the promise God has made to change sorrow to joy.

 Powerful and surprising God, bless our efforts and use us to fulfill your promises.

Jill Schumann is the president and CEO of Lutheran Services in America, Baltimore, Maryland, USA.

December 22
Matthew 1:18-25
“…and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” (v. 23)

This verse conjures up the image of a mother and baby…how a baby trusts and takes that first step, knowing mother is there if baby should fall. So it is with God, who is always there and wants us to know this. So God sent a special gift, called Emmanuel. The good news is not just the arrival of this gift — Christ. But Jesus is the good news. Emmanuel. God thought of our every need! He knew I would have low and painful moments and wanted me to know that through it all he would be with me. God knew that some times I would not only feel alone but would be alone and rejected, and wanted me to know he would always be with me. He knew that disease could damage my relationship with him, but God promised to be with me. And in that difficult circumstance I am to stand secure, for absolutely nothing can separate me from his love.

God, help us to worship you right now. In this moment. Even when we do not feel your presence, help us to know you are right here with us. Amen.

Bhatupe Mhango is a young Christian woman from Malawi who is openly living with HIV and works with the United Nations.

December 23
Message of Great Joy

**Luke 2:1-14**

"Do not be afraid, for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people." (v.10)

I can remember the devastation I first felt on being told I was HIV positive. My world was falling apart. I thought of my son who was only five years old and tried to imagine what it would be like for him to grow up without a father. I was filled with despondency as I considered not being able to see him grow up. Was there a way out? How could I possibly live just a little longer?

I believe that the despair I felt on finding I was HIV positive is similar to the despair which the people of Israel were living in when the angel Gabriel first spoke to Mary. They waited longingly for a freedom which scripture had promised but which just did not seem to come. Into their despair the light of God shone. Today God reaches out to people everywhere with hope and love.

*God of love and grace, thank you for coming to me and renewing my hope. Come anew into my heart this Christmas. Amen.*

Fr. Japé Heath is General Secretary of the African Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected by HIV and AIDS (ANERELA+) and assistant priest at St. Mary the Less, Jeppestown, South Africa.
He Understands Your Pain

John 1:1-14
And the Word became flesh and lived among us ... full of grace and truth. (v. 14)

God understands all our aches and pains because Jesus experienced them too when he came to earth as a human being with a physical body. “The Word became flesh.” Our invisible God became visible. Jesus suffered the limitations of living in a body susceptible to wounds and disease and hurts and illness and fatigue. He didn’t just suffer for us — he suffers with us.

Jesus also “lived among us” — not in some insulated, detached, protected castle. He experienced the messiness of relationships so he also empathizes with our emotional aches and pains. Jesus understands the fear, the heartache, and the stigmatism often associated with HIV and AIDS — because he suffered rejection, loneliness, and crushing grief.

How does Jesus want us to handle our pain, and the pains of people living with AIDS? The same way he did: “with grace and truth.” God’s grace gives us hope to go on. God’s truth points the way.

Jesus, thank you for coming to earth at Christmas and understanding my pain. Today I receive your grace to keep going and I commit to following the truth. Be my Savior and Lord. Amen.

Dr. Rick Warren is founding pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Orange County, California, USA and author of The Purpose Driven Life.
Ricky Ray and Ryan White, two child hemophiliacs infected by HIV-contaminated blood products in the United States, found there was no room for them in their schools. Both were kicked out for having AIDS.

For baby Jesus, his place in the manger was a sign to the shepherds of divinity.

But, the lack of room in Ricky and Ryan’s schools was a sign of social injustice; it sparked a public outcry, support for them, and a reversal of the prejudicial decision that drove them into the cold. People living with HIV and AIDS the world over die needlessly every day because of fear, stigma, social inequities – and simply because they are different.

All loving God, we pray that there will soon come a day when, as in your heart, there is a place of honor for all people on Earth. Amen.

Eric Sawyer has been living with HIV in New York City for 26 years and co-founded the AIDS activist group ACT UP.

December 26
Reborn

Luke 2:1-14
“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!” (v: 14)

Every one of us has the opportunity to be born again – to experience the abundant life Christ has to offer. Not everyone capitalizes on the opportunity.

In 1994, I had lived with HIV for six years, lost three members of my immediate family – one of them to HIV. I felt I had nothing to live for. I left the U.S. where I was resident and returned home to Uganda, resigned to dying. In Uganda, I came down with a series of opportunistic infections that nearly killed me, but I recovered. My faith in God was tested but I realized there was a reason to live; I could touch lives with my experience. I give God the glory for my abundant life.

Lord, thank you for the miracle of a new life. Amen.

Winnie Ssanyu Sseruma is the HIV Mainstreaming Coordinator at Christian Aid, UK.

December 27
Grief of God

Jeremiah 31:15-17
Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more. (v.15b)

The people of God were being chastized for their sin and rebellion; a foreign army had conquered Israel and Jerusalem. Rachel cries out in a time of spiritual and moral turmoil, giving voice to God’s anguish over the loss of her children. Rachel’s weeping is a form of resistance.

In our time of grief, mothers like Rachel show us how to give witness to what is wrong — more importantly, how to articulate our hurt and anger. Globally, mothers have lost their children to AIDS and related illnesses and refuse to conceal their despair. It is easier to refuse to be comforted than it is to have comfort refused.

When we are witness to the pain of another, it is natural for us to want to fight their battle for them. Rachel’s grief speaks to mothers across the ages, reminding us to be inconsolable as long as our children suffer. She inspires us because she will not be placated. Rachel moves us to feel, to grieve, and to take action for the promises made in the response to AIDS.

Almighty God, deal graciously with those who mourn and cast every care on you; may they know the consolation of your love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Rachel Ong is a Catholic AIDS activist currently working in China.
Take Time to See Jesus

Luke 2:8-20
“Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” (v.15b)

When the shepherds heard the news from an angel about the birth of “a Savior, who is the Messiah” (v.11), they leaped into action. They “left with haste” (v.16) to Bethlehem to “see” Jesus for themselves. They arrived and saw him lying in a manger.

What a blessing they received, we may think – to see the Messiah with their own eyes. But, in fact Jesus invites us to see him physically with our eyes in all those who are sick, hungry, thirsty, imprisoned, homeless, and naked (read Matt 25:31-45).

In this HIV and AIDS era which is driven by the social evils of poverty, stigma, and discrimination, we are called to see Jesus in the faces of all people living with HIV and AIDS, and all people affected by this epidemic.

Creator God, we thank you that you created all of us in your image. Amen.

Musa W. Dube is a Professor of the New Testament at the University of Botswana.

December 29
True Joy

Isaiah 61:1 & 62:3
...he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted. (61:1b)

Pastor Patricia tested HIV+, a disease she believed was a curse and a punishment. During four years of fasting, praying, and testing positive, she developed a bitterness toward her husband.

One day as she prayed, asking God for his death – believing he was infecting others – God dealt with her heart. She realized she was not right with God, who does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked. She cried: “Create in me a clean heart, O God….” (Psalm 51:10-14). The burden and bitterness were lifted away, the love for her husband was renewed; she wanted them to live! She wanted to know more about HIV and AIDS and asked God for new direction.

Is there something you could do to make someone else happy, express great appreciation, reduce your own requests, and hide a disappointment? Focus on the Lord’s faithfulness, how much God has done for you, and then see how you can share joy with others.

Lord Jesus, as we focus on your faithfulness, make us your instruments of love amid the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Amen.

Pastor Patricia A. Sawo is the African Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected by HIV and AIDS (ANERELA+) Eastern Africa Regional Coordinator, Kenya.
Promote Justice

Isaiah 61:8-10 & 62:3
For I the Lord love justice... (61:8a)

We are one body of Christ; if one member suffers, we all suffer together. The Lord our God calls upon us to be compassionate; to suffer with those who suffer, to enter their places and hearts of pain, and to seek lasting change for their suffering.

In this HIV and AIDS era, shall we not have zero tolerance for the stigma and discrimination of HIV and AIDS? Should we not do all that is necessary to eliminate the isolation, rejection, fear, and oppression of the infected and affected in our communities? (Luke 6:36) And, should we not collectively and persistently undertake our prophetic and advocacy role until quality care and treatment are available to all who need them?

Declare the jubilee and proclaim liberty throughout the land and to all its inhabitants. (Leviticus 25:10) For unless and until justice is served to all people in the world, until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream, our moral consciousness will never be free. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Gracious God, guide us day by day in every way that we might be instruments of your love, compassion, and healing as we encounter neighbors in need. Amen.

Bishop Mvume Dandala is the General Secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches.
Psalm 8
What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? (v. 4)

We all like to be remembered. The greetings we receive for birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas, and the New Year lift our hearts. We feel even better when someone of importance remembers us.

Some years ago I was being introduced to a prominent person in Cuba. Like others, I was slightly nervous. But that changed dramatically when the dignitary greeted me familiarly, and by name. Being remembered in this way lifted my heart for a long time afterwards. But it strengthens me even more to know that the greatest Dignitary of all never forgets me.

Our loving God always remembers us – thoughtfully and kindly. God cares for us. Each one of us matters in God’s eyes. We can count on universal access to God’s care and support. These are there for each one of us, always and without fail, no matter what the circumstances.

Kind and concerned God, help us always to remember that you are mindful of us and that you care for each one of us individually and personally. Amen.

Rev. Michael Kelly is a Jesuit priest and AIDS activist, living in Lusaka, Zambia.

January 1
Our God Always Cares

Isaiah 63:7-9
. . . be redeemed them; be lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. (v. 9)

In times of difficulty, we are tempted to feel that God has forgotten us; that if God did care for us in the past, God no longer cares.

We are not always able to understand why God allows suffering to assail us. Oftentimes, in the midst of suffering, we have to admit that: “We now see but a poor reflection, as in a mirror” what God intends to do in us through that suffering.

In order to prevent discouragement and dismay, we need to recall the many good things that God has done for us in the past. Because God always cares, the same kindness and compassion, the same mercy and love that God bestowed upon us in the past will again be given to us and will carry us through in the future.

Gracious God, help me to realize that I am always under your care, even in the midst of suffering. Amen.

Dr. C. René Padilla is Director of Ediciones Kairos, the publishing house of the Kairos Foundation of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

January 2
I’m HIV Positive – Praise the Lord!

Psalm 148

Young men and women alike, old and young together... Praise the Lord. (v. 12,14b)

I met Vipin, a Hindu, when his failing eyesight had forced him to drop out of university. Diagnosed HIV positive, he knew medicines and a healthy lifestyle could sustain him. Unfortunately, he had to discontinue his antiretroviral drugs, and the virus’ mutation forced him toward even more unaffordable drugs. I read to him from the Psalms whenever we met, and he found solace from: the prayer of the afflicted (Ps. 38/39), the request for deliverance (Ps. 142/143), and the prayer for protection (Ps. 91).

Surgery has given fresh hope for improving his eyesight, an NGO has started him on second-line treatment for free, and his family now support him. Presenting him with a copy of the Psalms, I suggested he go through the ‘bouquet of praises’ (Ps.145-150) with a new vista of hope which had seemed to elude him earlier. Vipin can join “Young men and women alike” – nay, all Creation – in praising God.

Creator God, remind us that we are part of your creation, and incorporate within us the harmony you have bestowed upon it. Amen.

Fr. Philip Kuruvilla is a consultant on HIV and AIDS to the Christian Conference of Asia and the Director of the Indian Orthodox Church’s Student Movement in the Diaspora, India.

January 3
Open Your Eyes

Luke 2:22-40
“…for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples.” (v.30-31)

The price of peace, the price of salvation, is that we open our eyes. The road to peace is that we open our eyes. The criteria for peace is that we open our eyes. We must open our eyes for us to see what God has prepared for us.

God will only use us as instruments of God’s salvation if we open our eyes to see. God’s salvation is ever before us. It is right in front of our eyes. With our eyes wide open we can see and understand what troubles the heart of God. We can see where we have turned our hearts away from those God loves. We can understand where we are being called to be with those who need our strength, to speak for those who have no voice, to share with those who do not have as we do.

It is true. We will only understand God’s salvation when we are open to God showing us what God has prepared for all peoples. We will see and be at peace when we have seen through the eyes of God.

Lord, make us instruments of your salvation. Open our eyes so that we may see. Strengthen us to understand the things we see and know that they are within your plan. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Richard Fee was Moderator of the 2004 General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and currently serves as its General Secretary.
Put Our Talents to Work

Matthew 25: 14-28
“Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master.” (v. 21)

It is very easy to be overwhelmed by the magnitude of the impact HIV and AIDS has on our world, especially in the area of stigma. It is much easier to wash one’s hands of the responsibility of acting, especially in the light of this magnitude. However, as people of faith, we are called and compelled by our God of love and mercy to choose the narrow and arduous road in pursuit of justice for those whose voices are not heard.

Like the servants in the parable of the talents, each one of us has been entrusted with a role to play. We are to protect the rights and dignity of people living with HIV and AIDS, particularly our women and children. According to each one’s means and abilities, let us boldly and faithfully put our talents to work so that collectively we will rid our world of its greatest plague – discrimination.

King Jesus, keep on blessing us. Amen.

Bishop Paul is Vice President of the All Africa Conference of Churches and Bishop of Mission Affairs at the Coptic Orthodox Church, Kenya.

January 5
Worship in Our Living

Matthew 2:1-12

… they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. (v. 11)

Wise men of the East followed a star to the Holy Land to pay homage to the newborn Christ Child. What does “homage” mean? Homage is adoring, venerating – but also includes glorifying and thanksgiving.

“Worship” is another English translation of the Greek word. It is not only something we do when we kneel or lift our hands and voices in praise. We must worship in our living – by the way we treat our families, our neighbours, our society. We are also called to be missionaries of healing in the midst of illness and disease, crises and suffering.

Together with the wise men from the East, we worship Christ our Lord; it is an act of our faith. To believe that God exists – that Truth exists – is also to believe that God acts. And we keep God’s promise to help us and strengthen us throughout the fierce and bitter storms we encounter in this life.

O Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, help us to be true worshippers and good healers of injustice and illness. Amen.

Archpriest Vladimir Fedorov (Moscow Patriarchate), is president of the Interchurch Partnership “Apostolic city – Nevskij perspective” in St Petersburg, Russia.

Epiphany • January 6
Thanks

Special thanks are due to all of the authors who have generously contributed to this calendar with open hearts, a spirit of compassion and a commitment to provide leadership and keep their promises in the response to HIV and AIDS.

Rev. Ferdy Baglo of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada served as the editor of the calendar.

Printed by Augsburg Fortress Press, USA on recycled paper.
Designed by Ms. Natalie Ott of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance

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More information

For actions you can take and more information on the role of faith-based organizations in responding to HIV and AIDS and holding leaders accountable, see:  www.e-alliance.ch. This includes biblical resources, liturgies and worship materials, stories, training and educational materials, and much more. You may also subscribe to the free “Keep the Promise” HIV and AIDS Campaign bulletins and action alerts at the same address.

Free copies (English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and German) of “Keep the Promise: a teaching resource on HIV and advocacy for youth” can be ordered at:  www.e-alliance.ch/hiv_curriculum.jsp

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The World AIDS Campaign is a strategic partner in advocating for strengthened global leadership to achieve universal access: www.worldaidscampaign.org