

Zero Discrimination

Service for World AIDS Day 2011 ¹

The World AIDS Day theme for 2011-2015 is drawn from the new UNAIDS Strategy “Getting to Zero,” which focuses on zero new infections, zero discrimination and zero aids-related deaths. This liturgy, prepared by Ecumenical partners in Germany, focuses on the concept of “Zero Discrimination.”

In Germany the on-going discrimination and stigmatisation of people living with HIV is a major issue. People are still afraid to talk openly about their status in our congregations, communities and society. Despite the fact that we have clear legislation on non-discrimination, people living with HIV, counsellors, social workers, and AIDS-service organisations, tell numerous incidents of neglect and stigmatisation of people living with HIV.

This liturgy seeks to encourage each and every one of us to understand and promote Zero Discrimination in our specific contexts and church communities. Many have talked about discrimination, written about it, protested about it. Rather than just provide more words, we hope that this liturgy, using images and drama, can model acceptance and inclusion.

LITURGY

Setting: A single candle is lit at the front of the church, near the cross if there is a cross. Everyone who enters the congregation is given an unlit candle. Those who are gathered are invited to sit close to one another.

Three strokes of a gong start the service.

Voice

(a young, clear voice loudly and audibly calls from the gallery or through a window)

My God, my God why have you forsaken me?

¹ ¹ Prepared by Rev. Dr. Ernst-Friedrich Heider (AIDS counselling services Evangelisch-Lutherische Landeskirche Hannovers) and Rev. Ute Hedrich (Institute for Mission Ecumenism and Global Responsibility of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia), as representatives of the committee for Ethics, Theology and HIV and AIDS of Action against AIDS - Germany

*Why are you so far from helping me?
So far from the words of my groaning?
Why are you so far?
Why do I not feel your closeness?
My enemies' words encircle me.
They open wide their mouths
Like a raving and a roaring lion.
I am poured out like water
And all my bones are out of joint.
My heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast
My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.
It feels as if I was dead but I am not dead!
Surrounded I feel alone, I do not see any way out.
It tears my courage into pieces.
Don't join. Don't gape!
My God, my God. (based on Psalm 22)*

Choir (or single voice)

Kyrie eleison*

Spoken Scene with three people (I, II, III)

I Discrimination – what a word!
II It means “differentiate”, “ignore” “put in a corner”, “avoid”.
III It means “put at a disadvantage” and “debase”.
II It means quite actively and intentionally to rob someone’s dignity; to leave someone out; to exclude.
III It becomes “us” and “them”!
I Too often we are silent.
II Too often we don’t say a word.
III After all, we have nothing to do with it.
II Do we have nothing to do with it?
III There are some things we simply don’t want to hear!
I But discrimination is the same all over
II It’s the same for those who are suffering hunger
III and those who are minorities
II and those from a different culture or religion
I and those with HIV and AIDS.
II It has been going on for decades.
I and always more and more people are infected and affected!

- II We pretend as if it has nothing to do with us!
III We just ignore.
II But discrimination – it isn't just a word – it is our reality!

Music

Reader: Our God hears the cry of those who are left out. Our God knows what it means to feel stigma and discrimination. Our God calls us to include, accept, love. Today we come together to see a world of zero discrimination.

Confessional Prayer

Leader: God, I find it difficult to set who I am aside, to not focus on myself. It is difficult, especially when what I see seems strange.

I know that people are different; they live differently, love differently, believe differently, hope differently. But still, understanding strangers is not easy. I don't want to leave my safe perspective. I want to stick to myself, to what I understand.

May your peace find me. May this peace reassure me so that I know I can step away from my safe place.

Help me to see a world where all people can access HIV prevention, treatment, care and support; where the dignity, quality of life and rights of everyone living with or affected by HIV are upheld.

Help me work with others for a world where no more people die of AIDS-related illnesses, no more people are infected with HIV and where everyone is respected and loved, living as Jesus taught us to.

Amen.

Scene 1:

A group silently enters the front of the church and stands together as a circle: Each person puts their arms on the shoulders of the person next to them to create a closed circle, their heads are bowed. There is silence. After a few moments a single person walks in (dressed with different colours than the group) and tries to enter the circle. The person hesitates at first and then tries to push in with more energy. Some of the group turn to keep him out. The scene freezes with the image of the group keeping the individual out. Then the group departs to one side and the single person to the other side.

Music

Scene 2:

An older and a younger woman are sitting next to each other sharing bread and eating together happily. Suddenly the younger one says: "I need to tell you, I am HIV positive!"

The scene freezes and is held for a moment. Then the actors relax.

The older woman says, "I am HIV positive too – I am positive to all people living with HIV. Come, let us eat."

OR

The older woman says, "I have arthritis and I can't see very well. I have to watch my blood pressure and my cholesterol. I guess we all have something. It doesn't make either of us any less valuable, any less important. Come, let us eat."

Music

Scene 3:

A young man is talking with his girlfriend. They are flirting with each other, planning their evening together. He tells her that he is just coming back from the doctor, who had tested his blood for HIV. He laughs. "No, I am not positive! Okay, have a good afternoon! I will see you later!" Both turn to go their separate ways.

The girlfriend leaves, and he walks a few steps further, still smiling, and takes an envelope out of his pocket. He opens it and removes the letter. He slowly looks up. He looks serious. "It can't be me, it can't be me. What should I tell her, if? What should I tell her? What should I tell her? What, I? Not me!" He looks at the congregation, pauses – and then leaves.

Music:

Scene 4

The young man and girlfriend from scene 3 enter from opposite sides of the church. They greet one another and sit on two chairs, like they are watching TV together. The boyfriend puts his arm around her, then removes it, looking uncomfortable. He looks up at the audience, not at her and says "I have something to tell you." She looks

at him and he says “I am HIV positive.” The scene freezes and is held for a moment. Then the actors relax.

The girlfriend leans over and hugs him.

Reading from the pulpit

Letter to the Galatians 3:28 CEB

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Scene 5

The people from Scene 1 enter and resume the image of people from the circle blocking out the one person. One of the people blocking the person out steps back and says: “No Jew or Greek.”

The next person blocking steps back and says: “No slave or free.”

The next person steps back and says: “No young or old.”

Another steps back and says “No male or female.”

Gradually the circle is opened up so that it is a semi-circle at the front of the church and it ends with them all saying “No Black or White, No rich or poor, No African or European or American or Asian, No HIV positive or HIV negative.”

Everyone in the circle takes a candle from a box which is at the front. The first person who spoke takes the candle which has been burning and lights the candle of the person next to him/her. Then the two of them light the candles of the next person, until all the people at the front have their candles lit. Then they light the candles of the people in the congregation.

The leader reads:

You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can't be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 5:14-16 CEV

Leader: We are the ones who must work to get to zero. God, help us work together – to shine your light – and build a world with zero new infections, zero discrimination, and zero AIDS-related deaths.

(A sermon could be given here. We don't think that it is needed, but some stories can be shared that model people showing zero discrimination. You can find stories of people of faith modelling acceptance at: <http://www.e-alliance.ch/en/s/hivaids/world-aids-day/> .)

Hymn

Creed (by Dorothee Sölle)

I believe in God
who didn't create a world
full of things that are the same,
who doesn't rule in accordance with eternal laws
which are unchangeable
nor under the natural order
of poor and rich
experts and uninformed
rulers and those who depend on their mercy.

I believe in God
who supports the protests of the living
and the change of all conditions
through our work
and through our politics.

I believe in Jesus Christ who was right when he,
"as an individual who can't change anything"
just like us
worked for the change of all conditions
and who perished in so doing.
Compared with him I realize
how our intelligence cripples
and our fantasy stifles
our efforts are wasted
because we don't live like he did.

Everyday I am afraid
that He died in vain
because he is buried in our churches
because we have betrayed His revolution

in obedience and fear of authorities

I believe in Jesus Christ
who rises from the dead in our life
so that we can become free
from prejudice and arrogance
from fear and hatred
and drive His revolution
towards His reign.

I believe in the Spirit
that came into this world with Jesus
to the community of all nations
and our responsibility for what
becomes of our world,
a valley full of lamentation, hunger and violence
or the city of God

I believe in the just peace that can be created
in the possibility of a meaningful life
for all people
in the future of this world of God.
Amen.

*Translation of the German Credo of Dorothee Sölle: Dorothee Sölle, aus dies.,
„meditationen & gebrauchstexte“, Gedichte. © Wolfgang Fietkau Verlag,
Kleinmachnow, www.fietkau.de. Used with permission*

Prayers of Intercession

God, often it is easier to blame someone, or ignore them, or distance myself from them – rather than to offer them dignity! But, God, teach me to see, not the crowd, but each and everyone who is outside – my church, my community perhaps even my sense of “right” and “wrong”. Sharpen my sense of their God-given dignity, awaken my feelings of justice, empower my sensitivity to love in the midst of my daily life.

Your grace is needed and so we call to you

Sing: Kyrie eleison*

**Note: Kyrie eleison is a song which means "God have mercy." If you do not know the song, the congregation can respond with the words "God have mercy" after each time the leader says: "and we call to you."*

God, today we think about young people who are unable to go to school because of their HIV status. We think of children who must listen to the murmurs of others or sit alone. Sometimes discrimination is quite visible: how different measurements are used and how a hug is not given. Sometimes it is invisible: a hurtful word said behind a person's back, a feeling felt in one's heart. God help us not to give up. Help us fight discrimination. Help us open closed circles.

Your mercy is needed and we call to you:

Singing: Kyrie eleison

God we think about people who are discriminated against because of what they do, who they are, where they live. We pray for people who cannot share their status or who are denied care because they fear the reactions of others. Help us to be more open and inviting for each and everyone, whoever they are, wherever they come from.

God we need your mercy and therefore we call to you:

Sing: Kyrie eleison

God, we know that our societies and governments have to change. We have to open up and admit entrance to all. We should not merely incorporate universal human rights to our constitutions but apply them in everyday life so there is life, equality and dignity for all, no matter what HIV status people have. Enable us, God, to stand up for human rights and dignity for all, help us to build up solidarity and power, so that changes will happen.

Your mercy is needed. We call to you:

Sing: Kyrie eleison

Further intercessions may be added but they should concretely refer to discrimination and inclusion, love and justice.

God, we conclude this prayer with the words given to us by Jesus:
Our Father in heaven...

Blessing

God, bless the growing of your heart
for a world that often is merciless and narrow.
May God save your gentleness and protect it from
breaking under the hardness of life.
May God free you from imaginations, opinions and traditions,
That removes you from yourself and from God.
May God free you from pre-judgments of people and from a
belief full of fear that hinders life.
May God give you memories of good days,
make the longing for a place of its fulfilling remain:
deep in ourselves.

Amen

(Author unknown)

Music to conclude the service

Ideally, the service should be followed by an invitation to share together what was seen and experienced. But even if people depart without talking, what was experienced will continue to spark reflection.