

HIV and AIDS: Stories of Partners' Work

United Church partners, with support from Mission and Service, are actively working at “getting to zero”—zero new infections, zero discrimination, and zero AIDS-related deaths—in their own communities.

Around the world, churches are living with and affected by HIV and AIDS. People who live and die with HIV and AIDS are our friends and family, our teachers and neighbours, our pastors and priests. Mission and Service partners are taking up their pastoral and prophetic role to overcome stigma and discrimination, to care for body and spirit, and to advocate for universal treatment and effective forms of prevention in their communities and in their regions.



Building Church Competence to Address HIV & AIDS (Christian Conference of Asia)

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) is a regional partner that brings together 17 councils and 21 member churches. In June 2012, CCA held a “Because I Care” concert in Malang, Indonesia, during a seminar/writing workshop it conducted on “Asian Theological Reflection on HIV & AIDS.”

The goal of the seminar was to increase the awareness and knowledge of participants regarding HIV and AIDS and to encourage spiritual and theological reflections on the sufferings of the affected people, their dependants and caregivers. Participants also reflected on the interconnectedness of HIV and AIDS with issues of gender inequality, sexual orientation, and reproductive health. People living with HIV and AIDS participated and brought their lived experiences to the discussions.

The United Church of Canada supports the Christian Conference of Asia in its efforts to overcome stigma and discrimination, and in building the capacity of its member churches to effectively support those affected by the pandemic.

The National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) built further on this work by bringing its member churches together to deliberate, share initiatives, and give input into the HIV and AIDS policy of the NCCP. Mission and Service contributions have directly supported this work.

More info:

Christian Conference of Asia:

- CCA's HIV/AIDS Concerns blog: <http://cca-hiv aids.blogspot.ca>
- Profile on United Church site: www.united-church.ca/partners/global/asia/regional

National Council of Churches in the Philippines:

- Profile on United Church site: www.united-church.ca/partners/global/asia/philippines

Working for Change with Hope (Christian Council of Tanzania)

The Christian Council of Tanzania's KIVUKO Project in Geita District is a powerful example of what can be accomplished when communities come together in support and solidarity. The project is carried out through local church volunteers who mobilize the community and provide home-based care and accompaniment to people living with HIV and AIDS.

With support from Mission and Service and the Extra Measures program, the project facilitates support groups of 17–20 people to pool their resources in income-generating projects.

Many people living with HIV and AIDS have commented that their participation in support groups has given them hope. In support groups, people learn new roles as they give and receive information, and are able to express their feelings freely. The group provides opportunities for people to discuss concerns that they fear would burden family and friends. "You will find that there is always hope, even if what you are hoping for changes," one member of the Upendo Church Support Group commented.

More info:

Christian Council of Tanzania:

- Profile on United Church site: www.united-church.ca/partners/global/africa/tanzania



Upendo Church Support Group: Full of hope, after a training session, members are filling in forms for small loans as an agreement with their commitment to work hard and repay the loans so that others may also benefit.

Photo: Christian Council of Tanzania

A Caring and Transforming Church (KOINONIA, Brazil)

Koinonia is the Ecumenical and Service presence of the churches in Brazil. Its AIDS and Rights program is co-funded by Mission and Service and CIDA (the Canadian International Development Agency). The program helps

- overcome the stigma and discrimination regarding HIV/AIDS through education actions on AIDS and rights together with religious communities, including Christian churches, *Candomblé* (the African-language word that designates the most important Afro-Brazilian religion), *Quilombo* communities (the African-language word used in Brazil to refer to rural Black communities directly descended from slaves), and rural worker and small farmer organizations
- stimulate and support local communities to carry out education and prevention activities related to HIV/AIDS, through training and accompaniment of peer educators on reproductive health, sex education, and gender relations

A recent training course for promoters of the Life, Faith + Joy campaign, held in São Paulo, covered vulnerabilities and rights of people living with HIV and AIDS. One speaker, Heloise Range Alves, Policy Coordination for Sexual Diversity in São Paulo, dealt with the subject “family rights, workers and people living with HIV and AIDS,” using stories from real life. For example, she led a discussion of the difficulties facing trans people—from the use of gendered nicknames to choosing which bathroom to use.

These lessons about rights were important training for those who will launch the campaign “Love casts out all fear,” to be held on December 1—World Day for AIDS Prevention.



Heloise Range Alves, Policy Coordination for Sexual Diversity in São Paulo, presents to promoters of the Life, Faith + Joy campaign

Photos: Koinonia



More info:

Koinonia:

- Profile on United Church site: www.united-church.ca/partners/global/caribbean/brazil

Stronger Together (Canadian Churches in Action, Canada)

Canadian Churches in Action (CCA) is a coalition of development and relief agencies of Canadian churches, including the United Church, working together with international partners. In addition to responding to disasters, CCA addresses chronic emergencies, such as HIV and AIDS, that can exacerbate poverty and hinder community-based development.

CCA works with local partners to strengthen the impact of partners' work on prevention strategies, palliative care, orphan support, education, and the fight against stigma and discrimination. In consultation with partners, two key issues have been identified:

1. Protecting and promoting the rights of those living with HIV and AIDS.
2. Involving both women and men to seek more equitable roles and relationships and address harmful gender norms and stereotypes that perpetuate the pandemic.

With contributions from Mission and Service, and working with partners such as the South Africa AIDS Trust, CCA has contributed to the development of a toolkit of information and theological materials addressing these issues. Partners use the toolkit in their ongoing programs on HIV and AIDS. Train-the-trainer workshops have been held with partners in Tanzania and South Africa, and one is planned for francophone partners in Central and West Africa, using a French translation of the toolkit.

Over the last decade, churches and their partners have made a difference in slowing down the spread of HIV and lessening the impact of AIDS through community-based approaches. Building on these experiences, CCA aims to continue supporting opportunities for partners to acquire the skills and knowledge to deal with the challenges and to access necessary resources.

More info:

Canadian Churches in Action:

- <http://churchesinaction.ca>



AIDS role play workshop in Tanzania:

Widow with head scarf: Lonnie Ncozana, Director, Blantyre Synod Health and Development Commission, Malawi;
Brother of widow's deceased husband: Webster Moyo, Ekwendeni Hospital AIDS Programme, Malawi;
Mother-in-law: Lulu Boxoza, Temba Community Development Services, South Africa;
Pastor intervening: Trevor Lubisi, John Wesley Community Centre, South Africa

Photo: Susan James, Presbyterian World Service and Development