# Children’s Resources on HIV/AIDS

*By Omega Bula and Eunice Chisunka*

Developed for the Children’s Time on World AIDS Day, at Trinity St. Paul’s and Bloor Street United Church, Toronto, this model might also be used with children in Sunday school, or midweek or inter-generational groups.

## Background for Leaders

Leaders face many challenges when discussing HIV and AIDS with children, especially with young children. They include:

* How to inform yourself. (Search out a variety of resources that help children to understand AIDS. See Resources at the end of this article.)
* How to decide what is appropriate to say about HIV and AIDS to the age groups represented in your church.
* How to talk about AIDS and the attendant illness or loss of a loved one without frightening children.
* How to be sensitive to children who are bereaved or children who have an ill parent suffering with AIDS-related problems.
* How to relate HIV/AIDS to our faith story. (Jesus calls on us to bring healing and hope to those who are suffering. Refer to one of the biblical stories where Jesus honours those who are suffering, especially children.)
* How to empower children to know that they can make a difference in this situation.

## Conversation

Gather the children for a conversation about HIV/AIDS. The conversation might include the leader saying...

**Leader**: Today is World AIDS Day. Does anyone know what this day is about? HIV and AIDS make people very ill, and many die. Medicines are available to help people live longer, but many people cannot afford the medicines. Jesus brought healing and hope to people when he lived. Does anyone remember a story about someone Jesus healed? (e.g. Jairus’ daughter.)

**Leader**: What kinds of things do your parent(s) do with you every day? (Encourage the children to respond, e.g. wake me up in the morning, give me lots of hugs and kisses, make sure I get to school on time, play with me, take my friends and me to hockey or soccer practice, read me stories, work so our family can buy the things it needs. Summarize their responses and consider adding a phrase that connects to the list of tasks e.g. "Parents who are sick with HIV/AIDS have trouble doing these jobs, and children have to do more of this work around the house when their parents are sick.")

**Leader**: Millions of children have been affected because of an illness (virus) called AIDS. Many people in parts of the world like Africa, India, China, Eastern Europe, the Caribbean, and also Canada are affected. (Indicate these regions on a globe or map.) Some people don’t have the money for nutritious food, which can keep them healthy, or for the very expensive medicines, which can help them lead healthier lives or live longer.

**Leader**: Listen to this story about a child in Zambia. *(Explain that Mercy is not a "real" person, but that her story reflects a "real" account of the lives of many children in Africa.)*

My name is Mercy. I am nine-years-old and live with my mother and father, grandmother, and six other children in our house in Lusaka, the capital of Zambia. My father is sick with HIV/AIDS so he can’t work or play with me any more. Some of my uncles and aunts are ill or have died of AIDS, too. There is only my mother and grandmother to care for me, my father, my sister, my two brothers, and my cousins. Families in Zambia always try to take care of each other.

When I see my father so ill and other families suffering or losing loved ones, I get very sad. Sometimes I get very angry and wonder if I will get sick too.

The people in my church try to help us in any way they can. My church has programs to tell us how to keep healthy and how to care for people who are sick. My church has activities which are fun — like singing and dancing and cooking for special meals. I feel better when people come by to visit us and read stories to my father or bring food for our family.

**Leader**: I wonder how our church might bring healing and hope to people suffering from HIV/AIDS in Canada or in other countries. What ideas do you have? One thing United Churches are doing is asking the Canadian government to make affordable to people who need it.

## Activities

(Invite the children to move to an activity that will help them to express something they have learned about HIV/AIDS. Ideally provide a choice of activities. They might include:)

* Create a picture detailing one or more parts of Mercy’s story.
* Use beads to make a bracelet or necklace. (Have red and white beads and thread or ribbon available.)
* Make a greeting card to send to some of the children to let them know that you are thinking about them and praying for them.
* Mark on the map of the world some of the countries in which the United Church is supporting programs related to AIDS. (Post a wall map of the world and have red and white pins on hand to mark the countries. See the list of countries in the box below.)

The United Church connects with churches and groups working on HIV and AIDS in China, India, the Philippines, Kenya, Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Jamaica, El Salvador, and Brazil.

## Closing

End the session with a prayer, e.g.:

Dear God, we thank you that you care for all the children of the world and don’t want anyone to be left alone. Today we ask that you will show special love to all children who are affected by the illness called AIDS. And help us to know how to show them that we care about them. Be with us as we think more about AIDS and talk about ways to help. Amen.

## Resources

* The UNICEF [Unite for Children Unite against AIDS](http://www.uniteforchildren.org) site has stories, actions, videos, and statistics
* [*Gathering*](http://www.ucrdstore.ca/magazines/gathering) (Advent/Christmas/Epiphany 2003-2004) (Toronto: UCC) includes ideas for inter-generational worship that centres on the AIDS pandemic.
* The Group of Five. Bye-bye, Secrets: A Book about Children Living with HIV or AIDS in Their Family (Toronto: The Teresa Group, 124 Merton St., Suite 300, Toronto, ON M4S 2Z3, 2002) Web: [www.teresagroup.org](http://www.teresagroup.org/).
* For more information about children and AIDS, consult **Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS**: [www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org).
* Consult <http://e-alliance.ch/en/s/hivaids> for information about the involvement of the ecumenical church through the **Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance**.
* **Talking to Children about HIV/AIDS** (Avert.org): see [www.avert.org](http://www.avert.org/professionals/hiv-social-issues/key-affected-populations/children).

**Omega Bula** and **Eunice Chisunka** developed this model for Trinity St. Paul’s and Bloor Street United Church in Toronto. It was adapted for general use by **Deborah Marshall** and **Jean Olthuis**.