



THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND – FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL – FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

Breaking the Silence Commitments of the Pan-African Lutheran Church Leadership Consultation in response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic Nairobi, 2-6 May 2002

We, the member churches of the Lutheran World Federation in Africa, represented by Bishops and Presidents, Women Leaders and Youth Leaders, meeting in Nairobi May 2002, make the following commitments in response to God's call to act and respond in the face of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

We do so as part of the Lutheran communion of churches, based on our doctrine of justification through God's grace being available to all. We intend to offer visible public leadership in our commitment to breaking down the injustices against those living with and affected by HIV/AIDS.

We commit ourselves to pray, seek justice and life in dignity for those living with and affected by and dying from HIV/AIDS.

It is our intention to be a communion where our congregations are healing communities of care and advocacy for all living with and affected by HIV/AIDS.

You have called us, O Lord, to be your servants; we make this commitment with Your help

We commit ourselves to breaking the silence

We recognize the many willing people who are currently engaged in and outside our churches in giving care and support. We will, however, publicly confess and acknowledge that we have too often contributed to stigmatization and discrimination and that our churches have not always been safe or welcome places for people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS. In some cases Holy Communion has been refused to people living with HIV/AIDS, funerals of people having died from AIDS have been denied and comfort to the bereaved has not been given. We repent of these sins.

We therefore commit ourselves to a faithful and courageous response in breaking the silence, speaking openly and truthfully about human sexuality and HIV/AIDS.

We recognize that it is especially important for the bishops, presidents and other church leaders to publicly speak and provide leadership in breaking the silence.

We will develop church policy on HIV/AIDS and encourage each congregation and church institution to develop and adopt an action plan for response and implementation.

Trusting in the Spirit of Mercy, we make this commitment with the help of God.

We commit our churches to become healing communities through prayer and action

The silence of persons living with HIV/AIDS and their families can only be broken when they know they will not be judged, excluded and discriminated against.

We commit ourselves to putting our words into deeds, following in the example of Jesus Christ, by making our churches safe places of support and community for those living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. This begins first of all by stopping all forms of condemnation and rejection.

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We will instead create environments of openness and acceptance and encourage all pastors and lay leaders to speak openly about HIV/AIDS and set an example in local parishes by respecting the dignity and place in the community for each person.

We will offer our church as a place for support groups, which we will initiate, with persons living with and affected by HIV/AIDS and we will include them in the planning and implementation of all our HIV/AIDS work.

Relying on the Spirit of Courage, we make this commitment with the help of God.

We commit ourselves to learning and education

We commit ourselves to develop a vision of the church, whose mission is not limited to membership, but fulfills itself in outreach to all people.

We commit ourselves to making education a high priority and to finding ways and means to teach ourselves and our people about HIV/AIDS.

We are prepared to engage in this education at all levels of the church, from leadership to local community, involving influential people in the community.

We will affirm the dignity of women and men through teaching about human sexuality and relationships, about love and mutual respect and equality.

Praying for the Spirit of Wisdom, we make this commitment with the help of God.

We commit ourselves to provide care and counseling

We commit to turning stigma and discrimination into care and counseling for people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS and we encourage and support voluntary testing.

We commit ourselves to address with confidence controversial issues that raise fear in us and contribute to the silence. We will support and provide further training in care and counseling.

We will strengthen the involvement of young peer educators.

We will especially seek to support people who are tested HIV positive in how to live a full quality of life as part of the community.

We will strongly condemn sexual abuse and will express full solidarity with all victims of sexual abuse.

We will commit ourselves to finding ways to care for AIDS orphans, child-headed households and women widowed by AIDS.

Surrendering our will to the Spirit of Service, we make this commitment with the help of God.

We commit ourselves to prevention

We commit ourselves to examine attitudes and behavior that can cause harm to our neighbor in the light of our Lutheran ethics.

We commit ourselves to taking a strong role to ensure prevention of HIV by assisting in efforts to reduce the spread of the pandemic.

We will speak the truth about the spread of HIV/AIDS and its prevention including the behavior change that is necessary.

We will not stand in the way of the use of any effective methods of prevention.

Listening to the Spirit of Truth, we make this commitment with the help of God.

We commit ourselves to further develop our theological understanding of the challenges of HIV/AIDS

We commit ourselves to deepening our theological understanding of the challenges of HIV/AIDS based on our Lutheran teaching. Specifically we will deal theologically with the problem of stigma and discrimination as an issue of social injustice.

We will preach a gospel of hope in the midst of the disaster of HIV/AIDS.

We commit ourselves to develop and utilize liturgy for worship that helps us cope with HIV/AIDS suffering and struggle.

We will ensure that such theological discussions are carried out at our seminaries and theological institutions of learning.

We will ensure that HIV/AIDS issues are adequately and contextually taken up in the curricula for theological education and in lay leaders training and in continuing education.

We commit ourselves to also develop and utilize HIV/AIDS related educational material for Sunday schools, confirmation classes church schools and other church institutions.

Assured by the Spirit's Inspiration, we make this commitment with the help of God.

We commit ourselves to collaboration and joining hands with those who fight AIDS

We commit ourselves to seeking out and working with other partners in our response to HIV/AIDS, especially with those who are living with and affected by HIV/AIDS and their organizations. We will be open to learn from people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS.

We recognize that we cannot accomplish this work on our own.

We affirm that as church we have to make a meaningful contribution to the national and international work.

Specifically we will work ecumenically with other churches, with other faith traditions, with NGOs, and our national governments.

We will make special efforts to link with UNAIDS and other relevant UN agencies.

We commit ourselves to linking with and using the Africa sub-regional resource persons in the Ecumenical AIDS Initiative of the World Council of Churches.

We will seek necessary resources to carry out our plans, including targeting our own financial resources for education, training, care and counseling.

As members with others of the Body of Christ, we make this commitment with the help of God.

We commit ourselves to advocacy work

We commit ourselves to advocate for accessible and affordable anti-retrovirals and opportunistic infections drugs and we will make the infrastructure and resources of our church available to provide the medical support for treatment.

We commit ourselves to advocate for just labor practices for people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS, as well as access to adequate medical care, housing and education.

We commit ourselves to advocate against harmful practices, whether modern or traditional.

Because we believe that where one suffers, all suffer, we make this commitment with the help of God.

We commit ourselves to fight poverty and working towards securing the livelihood of people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS.

We recognize poverty and illiteracy as compounding and resulting from the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. We therefore commit ourselves to work towards food security for those who can no longer sustain their livelihood, thus responding to basic human rights and the God given right to live in dignity.

We commit ourselves to fight corruption and we will hold our governments accountable for just distribution of resources, both nationally and globally, as ongoing injustice contributes to increased poverty and further spread of HIV/AIDS.

In the Spirit of our Savior Jesus Christ, who became poor that we might be rich, who suffered death that we might have life, we make this commitment with the help of God.