



# THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND – FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL – FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

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## COMPASSION, CONVERSION, CARE:

### Responding as churches to the HIV/AIDS pandemic

#### An Action Plan of the Lutheran World Federation

**Objectives:**            **Within an ecumenical context, to engage the LWF member churches in open discussion about HIV/AIDS, and in so doing to promote their active and courageous response**

**To provide support and resources, including financial resources, to ensure effective response**

## *I Introduction*

The purpose of this action plan is to motivate, strengthen and support member churches of the LWF to respond to the urgent pandemic of HIV/AIDS.

Churches of the Lutheran communion are called to respond to this pandemic because *the church itself has HIV/AIDS*. This disease and its effects are not only outside the church but in our very midst, provoking a significant challenge to the whole communion. In most congregations there is a person or a family who is in some way affected by HIV/AIDS. In some LWF member churches, the effects are not yet visible. In others they are evident in daily funerals, orphaned children and the breakdown of social and economic systems. The whole of the LWF communion shares in this shocking reality which is changing the nature of life as we have known it, and challenging what it means for us to be the church.

When one part of the body of Christ suffers, all of the body suffers. Within the global Lutheran communion, the suffering and anguish caused by HIV/AIDS impact all dimensions of our life together. In particular, this challenges our theology and ecclesiology – requiring an honest and humble reassessment of how some of our churches are actively reaching out, whereas others have sinfully excluded those whom Christ claims as his own. Through God's grace, we are empowered to repent, to turn around and face the reality of our neighbors who are affected by HIV/AIDS, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, to become transformed communities of inclusive hospitality.

According to Lutheran theology, the church is composed of those who are simultaneously both saint and sinner (*simil iustus et peccator*). Rather than primarily focused on certain acts (such as those related to sexuality), sin is a state of bondage that separates us from God and one another. This bondage is evident, for example, when people turn away from or shun those affected by HIV/AIDS. A Lutheran ethic seeks to be practical and realistic,



recognizing that what we do in this world will never be free of sin; we continually must rely on God's gracious forgiveness. We are called to use our common sense and judgment to discern how the lives of our neighbors who are vulnerable to and affected by HIV/AIDS can best be protected and enhanced.

Faith becomes active in justice-seeking love. The presence of HIV/AIDS in our body, our family and our community calls the church back to what it means to love and pursue justice. If we are the body of Christ in the world, we must do as Jesus did – live out God's love toward our sisters and brothers, speak out and advocate for just practices, and create supportive and caring communities of acceptance, safety, refuge and healing.

As a church we often are uncomfortable sitting at the side of a person or family with HIV/AIDS because this means facing so many related issues that make us uneasy, and around which many defensive theological and moralistic understandings have been built. These barriers distance the church from those who are most in need of care and acceptance in times of deep fear and grief. The church is hindered from speaking out prophetically on behalf of those who are suffering or whose dignity is violated. Responding with compassion to persons living with and affected by HIV/AIDS means challenging and moving beyond boundaries that have kept us from loving one another and seeking justice for all who are made in the image of God.

As churches we need to become safe places where people can speak about these realities without fear. We must dare to proclaim the gospel with full voice and live out God's gracious intention of abundant life for all. God's grace frees people of faith to break out of accustomed boundaries and taboos, to challenge irresponsible sexual practices, and to move into new perceptions of themselves and of God's healing activity in the world. We are freed and empowered to

- tell the truth to one another about what is happening in our lives and communities;
- speak together as adults, youth and children about sexuality and responsible sexual practices;
- teach new ways of relating to one another as women and men as equals, and especially new patterns of sexual responsibility by males;
- take initiatives to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and save lives.

The draped red ribbon has become the universal symbol of solidarity with those suffering from HIV/AIDS and a sign of hope that this pandemic will one day be overcome. To drape the AIDS ribbon around the cross reminds us of the deep compassion of Jesus for all who suffer from HIV/AIDS and the hope that new infections can be prevented. It is also a sign of solidarity with those who are affected by HIV/AIDS, their families and their communities, and of committed actions to stop this pandemic so that future generations will not be at risk.

### **The church feels compassion**

A prophetic call to the church is coming from those suffering from HIV/AIDS, who by their very presence move the church to respond out of compassion. Each person who is living with or affected by HIV/AIDS is made in the image of God. He or she is Christ in our midst – made vulnerable by this disease, and deeply in need of the unconditional love, acceptance and support of the church. Those not infected are also vulnerable, especially young people, who need the strong support of the church to educate and actively to promote prevention.

## **The church is “converted”**

Those who are HIV-positive or ill with AIDS have gifts to offer and wisdom to share with their community, especially the wisdom of what it means to live with HIV/AIDS. They have the knowledge, competence, interest and ability to give prophetic voice to their needs and hopes, their dreams and fears, and to motivate the church to respond.

As such persons share their stories and their lives, and as the church dares to listen, the church can be moved to repent of how it has sinned against those who are affected by HIV/AIDS, due to fear, lack of information, stigmatization, or a failure to act. Such persons have been isolated or deliberately excluded from the community. This is most disturbing when this exclusion has been legitimized with theological or moral reasons by church leaders. The church is called by Christ to repent, turning around to love those whom it has shunned. It must convey accurate information, be hospitable, and do what is needed to protect and ensure quality of life for those who are ill and protection for all who are vulnerable.

## **The church cares for all affected by HIV/AIDS**

Churches can become caring, accepting and prophetic communities for people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. With committed and outspoken leadership prepared to speak the truth about HIV/AIDS and its prevention, churches around the world, with millions of willing hands and caring hearts, can help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and care for all affected. There are resources available to support churches working in local communities in care, treatment, prevention and advocacy, which this Action Plan seeks to help churches access.

## ***II Elements of an LWF Action Plan on HIV/AIDS***

### **1. Gaining knowledge and raising awareness**

An urgent task is to promote dialogue and discussion that raises awareness about HIV/AIDS and the role and responsibility of churches. Key resource persons for these discussions are those who themselves are HIV-positive or living with AIDS. These discussions should include theological, cultural, pastoral, and spiritual aspects, as well as clear understandings of the nature of HIV/AIDS, its medical implications and what is needed for effective prevention and care. The focus should be on what the church is called to do as a healing and reconciling community, based on the inherent dignity of each person made in the image of God. Practices of church discipline that exclude persons on the basis of sexual practices need to be challenged. The purpose is to stimulate concrete and active involvement of churches in response to HIV/AIDS in order to save lives by preventing the spread of HIV and increasing the quality and possibility of life through treatment and care.

### **2. Training of leadership**

Those with responsibility for carrying out the church's commitment to HIV/AIDS work are those in positions of leadership. This includes bishops/presidents, pastors, teachers, medical personnel, leaders of youth and women's groups, diaconal supervisors and others. A key group are the ordained clergy, including bishops and pastors. The intent of this leadership training is to equip the people of God as a healing and reconciling community. Particular attention must be given to the roles and responsibilities of male leaders, and to ensure gender sensitivity in all aspects of training, and full participation of women and youth. Although the methodologies for training different kinds of leaders will vary, persons living with AIDS or

who are HIV-positive should be an integral part of the planning and implementation of this training.

### **3. Connecting experiences**

Within the different contexts and churches of the communion, there are many good experiences that need to be brought together so that churches can learn from and challenge one another. Individuals who are taking a leading role in addressing HIV/AIDS need to be better connected, in order to support and learn from one another. Persons should be brought together across different sectors (e.g. academic and practitioner; medical and theological; church leaders and persons living with HIV/AIDS). Particular attention needs to be given to connecting the experiences of the church leadership with those of people in the communities, and ensuring that experiences of women and youth are well integrated into all processes. Internet and e-mail communication possibilities should be used wherever possible. There needs to be cross-fertilization of experience at all levels.

### **4. Ensuring gender sensitivity**

It is critical that gender issues be addressed in relation to HIV/AIDS. This disease challenges the church to think and act differently about the roles of women and men in society. It affects the two genders differently, and calls for different kinds of responses. The vulnerability of females is increased when they lack the power to protect themselves sexually. Thus, from the perspective women and girls, the strategy of “ABC” (abstain, be faithful, use condoms) is not by itself adequate. Male health issues need to be addressed together with the need for men to assume greater responsibility for preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS.

### **5. Telling the truth about sexuality and sexual practices**

If churches are to be communities of care and support for people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS, and if they are to take a lead in the prevention of HIV/AIDS, they must become places of frank discussion and education about sexuality and sexual practices. From a Lutheran perspective, an important ethical criteria is whether such practices enhance or harm the life of the sexual partner and the wider community. On this basis, patterns of coercive, unprotected sexual intercourse must be challenged, as well as other harmful cultural practices. More equitable power sharing between women and men should be encouraged. Such discussions should become a normal part of Christian education programs and pastoral care, including in confirmation and marriage preparation.

### **6. Promoting and making visible church reflection processes**

The report of the 1988 LWF consultation on AIDS is foundational for work in this area. Ten years later, Latin American churches built upon this report and produced the Buenos Aires Declaration. Various churches and agencies have policy statements and strategies related to HIV/AIDS. Important ecumenical resources are the *Action Plan* of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA), and the WCC *Plan of Action: The Ecumenical Response to HIV/AIDS in Africa*. Drawing upon these and related documents enhances our sense of communion and connection with what has already been done.

### **7. Articulating a “prophetic presence”**

In this situation, as with other issues, God raises up individuals with a particular charisma to articulate the experience of those affected by HIV/AIDS and challenge the church to respond. Such persons are important in maintaining a focus and carrying out the programmatic commitments. The church needs to identify, encourage and support such persons in this crucial prophetic work.

## **8. Providing educational resources**

Resources need to be made more widely available to support awareness raising, training and exchange of experience, including worship, theological/ethical, and sex education materials. Many helpful resources already exist, including good examples of what churches are doing. New resources also need to be developed or collected, especially for use within the Lutheran communion. Materials need to be translated into local languages. Much of this work can and should be done ecumenically, particularly in cooperation with the EAA Website ([www.e-alliance.ch](http://www.e-alliance.ch)).

## **9. Ensuring financial resources**

Some LWF member churches are already doing a lot locally, alone and with other partners. This must be encouraged and enhanced in more of the churches, especially those lacking the financial resources for such work. Assistance is needed in applying for funding of local projects. Attention should be given to strengthening the links between related agencies and local communities working with HIV/AIDS in various churches around the world, and to simplify and expedite funding proposals. These initiatives must be undertaken cooperatively with the WCC and the EAA.

## **10. Connecting to civil society and government**

LWF member churches work within communities and in relation to governments at many levels. Linkages and working relationships must be created and developed with organizations outside of the church who are working in this area, even as LWF continues to clarify the particular role that churches can play. Particular attention should be given to national HIV/AIDS coalitions and platforms, and working with national governments in the development of HIV/AIDS and health care policy and planning.

## **11. Advocacy**

The advocacy response of the LWF will take place within the framework of the EAA. LWF member churches will be encouraged to join the EAA and thus become local and national participants in implementing its HIV/AIDS campaign. The goals and objectives of the EAA help to focus and make more effective national, synod/diocesan, and congregational action related to HIV/AIDS. Through its membership in the EAA and in its strategic planning group, the LWF as a communion has the possibility of coordinating its work with and making a significant contribution to the work of the EAA.

## **12. “For the healing of the world”**

Attention will be focused on the HIV/AIDS pandemic at the 2003 Assembly of the LWF, through the worship life, village groups, and other aspects of the Assembly, which meets under the theme, “For the healing of the world.” As member churches prepare for the Assembly, they should reflect on and share how they are responding to people and communities affected by HIV/AIDS. The Assembly is a crucial time for affirming and giving clear direction to LWF work in relation to HIV/AIDS.

### ***III How will we move forward on this Action Plan?***

A pandemic of this extent, which has such pervasive implications for our churches and the life and future of our communities, challenges all churches to be actively involved, together with governments and other actors in society. Within the framework of the international ecumenical response to HIV/AIDS, active and effective involvement by LWF member

churches is essential, for the communities that they serve and for the strengthening of the whole international ecumenical response. The member churches of the LWF have a shared responsibility to act in this crisis, and the LWF Secretariat – as the instrument of the member churches – has the responsibility to promote, support, and strengthen such action. The responses of the member churches can be challenged and strengthened by mutual exchange and encouragement, and by a common vision and set of objectives.

It is crucial that the LWF Secretariat have sufficient capacity and expertise to facilitate these tasks. This Action Plan has been developed and will continue to be followed by a staff working team, composed of persons who are committed to this work but who carry other fulltime responsibilities. Thus, there is an acute, urgent need for additional staff capacity, specifically, an AIDS resource person, who can ensure that mutual exchange is facilitated within the Secretariat and among the member churches, and who can work to enhance, accelerate and make their responses more effective under a common vision and set of objectives within the overall framework of the international ecumenical response.

To carry out the following specific actions, therefore, it is urgent that additional financial, personnel and other resources be secured, with budget over and above regular LWF fundraising.

In the following section, current involvement of LWF departments and staff is indicated. In addition, the anticipated percentage of the full-time-equivalent (FTE) of the AIDS resource person is indicated.

## **1. Formation of a group of resource persons from the regions**

Within each region of the LWF, there are many persons with considerable experience and expertise in the area of HIV/AIDS work. These should be identified and an HIV/AIDS resource group formed for the purpose of:

- sharing their experiences with one another and more broadly with the LWF communion;
- developing a training program for the LWF which grows out of the best practices within the communion; this should be designed to promote increased commitment and capacity of local churches to respond to HIV/AIDS.
- advising the LWF on the concept and implementation of the Action Plan.

This group, together with the Staff Working Team on International Affairs and Human Rights (IAHR) and HIV/AIDS, will constitute the planning group for the LWF HIV/AIDS Action Plan and will be in contact with the AIDS resource person, mainly through electronic communication. This group will include persons living with and affected by HIV/AIDS.

Links to elements: 2 3 5 6

Staff needs/resources: Department for Mission and Development (DMD) regional desks to assist with identifying persons  
Department for World Service (DWS) field programs to assist with identifying persons

## **2. Church leadership consultations**

The LWF Council decision mandates a church leaders' consultation for Africa. Since the problem of HIV/AIDS is critical in other parts of the world as well, it is urgent that such

consultations be held in other regions. The focus of these consultations would be the theological, cultural, pastoral, and spiritual areas identified above under “Gaining knowledge and awareness raising.” The issue of church discipline, in the sense of the exclusion of individuals from church fellowship and communion based on moral judgments of their behavior or lifestyle, should also be addressed in this context. Gender sensitivity and participation of women and youth is key in both substance and process. Shared ecumenical resources will be used as available to support the consultations, as well as documents from prior LWF and ecumenical church reflection processes. The lead department will be DMD with the consultations linking to other planned meetings as much as possible (including the pre-assembly gatherings and DWS regional consultations). However, the urgency of the issue should override the need to link them to future planned meetings if funding can be found to have separate consultations within a shorter time frame.

Links to elements: 1 3 5  
 Staff needs: DMD to take a lead role on church leadership consultations with particular involvement of DTS  
 DWS to take lead on DWS regional consultations, with DTS involvement

### **3. Systemizing experiences**

The experiences and best practices of the LWF member churches should be gathered and systematized around the question: “What is the response of churches to HIV/AIDS?”. These should be made available to all churches with consideration given to creating a folder, a video, Web database, etc. This should include LWF documents related to church reflection processes.

Links: 1 3 5 6 8  
 Staff needs: The youth intern is soliciting from Africa stories, experiences, best practices and relevant documents;  
 Additional staff capacity needed (10% FTE)

### **4. Website**

All feasible means should be employed to promote the swift and efficient sharing of resources, materials, policies, plans and actions among member churches. The World Wide Web is a powerful (but not the only necessary) vehicle for such sharing among LWF member churches. The LWF should actively engage in ecumenical initiatives to expand the range of resources available to our member churches. The relevant part of the Website of the EAA is designed to fulfill such a function.

Links: 1 3 4 6 8  
 Staff needs: Integrated into ongoing work for all

### **5. Linkages to other organizations**

Many LWF member churches are not accustomed to linking with other NGOs or to work with governments. In the LWF response to HIV/AIDS, churches need to be encouraged and helped to make these connections, to develop working relationships with outside partners, and to identify and apply best practices. Inviting outside organizations to participate in

workshops and consultations is one means of promoting such networking. The Office for International Affairs and Human Rights in collaboration with other departments has a special role to ensure these linkages with international processes.

Links: 3 8  
 Staff needs: Ongoing within existing work for all; IAHR for international processes

## **6. Provide resources and materials**

Specific needs of member churches for resources/materials need to be identified, and resources/materials developed where they are not already available or in preparation. Particular attention needs to be given to theological materials, materials dealing with sex, sexuality and gender issues, and resources related to worship and spirituality, as well as Christian education. Such resources/materials should be identified and developed ecumenically.

Links: 1 2 3 6  
 Staff needs: Department for Theology and Studies and DMD to contribute  
 Additional staff capacity needed (20% FTE)

## **7. Communication**

The existing publications and other communication means of the LWF can be used to communicate and give constant visibility to HIV/AIDS as a priority issue. This does not necessarily imply special thematic publications, but rather an ongoing presence in all publications of the experience of churches concerning HIV/AIDS. Through such publications, best practices and innovative and effective ideas should be shared and promoted.

Links to: 1 3 6  
 Staff needs: Ongoing within existing work

## **8. Project support**

It is necessary to provide adequate and rapid support to the HIV/AIDS related projects of member churches. Additional fundraising must be done for local church projects, and consideration should be given to establishing separate accelerated screening and decision-making procedures within the framework of approved 'AIDS program funding'. The LWF should be an advocate for local communities to seek funding to support their work on HIV/AIDS. This needs to be done in cooperation and consultation with related agencies.

Links: 7 3 but support for 1 2 3 5 6  
 Staff needs: Ongoing in consultation with WCC and related agencies  
 Additional staff to assist (20% FTE)

## **9. Capacity-building and training**

In addition to church leadership consultations, a program of capacity-building is needed which links to the existing networks and relationships within the LWF and ecumenically. The plan for such a training program will be one of the tasks of the resource group (see 1). The

implementation would require that regional plans be created, and a “Training of Trainers” regionally-based team approach. Such a training program would be developed also in consultation with the Ecumenical Center Working Group on HIV/AIDS with due consideration to linking into existing networks, particularly the WCC Africa Networking Project. The goal is to have trained people in each of the regions who can be resources to member churches in their response to HIV/AIDS.

Links: 1 2 3 5 6 8 9

Staff needs: All departments ongoing, particularly in cooperation with Human Resources Development desk of DMD  
Additional staff capacity needed (40% FTE)

## 10. Advocacy

The advocacy work of the LWF would be undertaken ecumenically within the framework of the EAA. In line with the EAA goals and objectives, and of the 1988 LWF consultation report, the primary focus of advocacy is *to work for the dignity and rights of people living with HIV/AIDS and for an attitude of care and solidarity that rejects all forms of stigmatization and discrimination*. This implies also promoting prevention in ways that address the root causes of vulnerability and poverty, and increased access to treatment for persons with HIV/AIDS. In addition, advocacy includes promoting the mobilization of resources to prevent HIV/AIDS and for the care and treatment of people who are affected.

Links: 1 3 4 5 8 9

Staff needs: IAHR related to international processes; DWS related to Strategic Planning Group of EAA, and all departments in implementation

## 11. Implications for churches of the UN Declaration on HIV/AIDS

International governmental and intergovernmental processes and commitments relative to HIV/AIDS are described in the Declaration of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on HIV/AIDS. This declaration provides a good framework for addressing governments and holding them to their commitments, as well as a reference point for determining the role of churches in response to the global processes. In some cases the commitments of governments go far beyond those that churches have been willing or able to make. This work is done within an ecumenical context but with particular attention to how Lutheran churches can contribute.

Links: 3 5 8 9

Staff needs: IAHR ongoing, Lutheran Office for World Community ongoing

## 12. Networking

In order to make the most of the experiences and expertise throughout the communion, networks need to be facilitated. This would be done through existing channels but making much more use of the existing information vehicles (e.g. LWI), Web-based resource sharing, and electronic communication. Networking would focus specifically on LWF member churches and field programs and link to the many other ecumenical, NGO and government actors.

Links: 1 2 5 6 8  
 Staff needs: Additional staff capacity needed (10% FTE)

### 13. LWF Assembly

In anticipation of the forthcoming Tenth LWF Assembly (2003), attention should be given to ensuring the integration of the campaign into the work and processes of the Assembly, especially the Village Groups'. In line with the LWF Council decision, HIV/AIDS should be a prominent feature of the pre-assembly meetings.

Staff needs: Staff responsible for worship, Village Groups, Bible studies and pre-assembly meetings

### *IV An LWF HIV/AIDS Program or Emergency Response*

Next steps:

1. Discussion and negotiation with partner agencies.
2. Additional expedited fundraising. Although some of the activities listed above could be funded through the ongoing SON process, the LWF Council called for a rapid and powerful response. This needs additional human and financial resources. The urgency of the issue should take precedence over normal planning processes.
3. Establishment of separate fast and flexible procedures for the identification, screening and funding of relevant church projects, in the context of the approved LWF-DMD development programs.
4. A tentative budget for the above Action Plan, particularly related to resource development, capacity-building and training, the resource group, an AIDS project support fund and for the AIDS resource person, for a three-year period (to begin as soon as funds are available), is proposed as follows:

(in USD)	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>Totals</b>
1. Resource development	30,000	30,000	30,000	90,000
2. Capacity building and training				
2.1 Exposure & education for church leaders	50,000	75,000	25,000	150,000
2.2 Training of trainers	20,000	30,000	30,000	80,000
2.3 Assistance to project planning & implementation	20,000	30,000	30,000	80,000
3. Resource group meeting & communication	10,000	10,000	10,000	30,000
4. AIDS project support fund	200,000	500,000	500,000	200,000
5. AIDS resource person, including travel budget	90,000	90,000	90,000	270,000
	420,000	765,000	715,000	1,900,000

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