

WORLD AIDS DAY Candlelight Vigil (Leaders Guide)

Environment: *This candlelight vigil should be held after dark, preferably outdoors if weather permits.*

Items needed:

- 1 bell, the deeper in tone the better
- 1 person to toll the bell
- 3 Readers, preferably with skills as lectors
- Taper candles for the congregation
- Copies of the Vigil Sheet for the congregation, **See page 5**
- Audio equipment for amplification, if necessary
- A table with HIV and AIDS information for after the vigil

(As people gather, the bell ringer begins to toll the bell once every fifteen seconds. This continues throughout the vigil. Once the congregation is gathered and silent, one candle is lit.)

Reader 1: When light shines in darkness, our surroundings become clearer. We see our world, and more importantly, we see that others are standing next to us. We recognize that we are not alone. When light shines in darkness, we live in hope.

(Reader 1 lights Reader 2's candle.)

Reader 2: Henri Nouwen writes that "hope frees us from the need to predict the future and allows us to live in the present, with the deep trust that God will never leave us alone"

The light that shines this evening brings us closer to our brothers and sisters who are affected by HIV. Connected by God's ever-expanding love, we see their humanity and they see ours. We share in their hope, for today HIV is no longer a death sentence. Today, proper care and treatment can allow people living with HIV to lead productive and hopeful lives.

(Reader 2 lights Reader 3's candle.)

Reader 3: Unfortunately, that hope is also faced with the reality that someone still dies of HIV-related causes once every fifteen seconds; once every time this bell tolls. We also know that 7,000 new people become infected with the virus each day. What shall be our response? Together, we can offer positive support through our advocacy, our donations of time and money, and through our prayers. In that spirit of hope and solidarity, let us pray ...

Almighty God, tonight we take vigil to seek your healing and strength. Be our light in darkness, O Lord, so we may recognize our common humanity with all those affected by HIV, with each orphaned child, each woman and each man. Grant us the courage to not judge people living with HIV as "bad" or "guilty," but to see them as you see them, as unique individuals deserving compassionate love and dignity. We ask this in your name, O loving Creator ...

All: Amen.

Reader 3: The darkness of HIV shall not overcome us. Let us now hear stories of hope from those touched by the disease.

Reader 1: My name is Srey Touch. I was born during the Cambodian civil war. My father died when I was 7, and my mother took ill. I began washing clothes for money at a very young age, and at 15 I was married. My husband and I are now separated, but when I last saw him, he was very ill, most likely with HIV. I recently was tested, and discovered I am HIV-positive. At the time, I was also expecting my second child and was incredibly worried she would contract the virus as well. Fortunately I was able to join a group home called Seedlings of Hope. While I was there, I enrolled in a project that teaches HIV-positive mothers how to prevent transmission of HIV. As a result, my baby, Lina, is HIV-negative. Seedlings of Hope is helping me stay strong so I can raise my children.

For Srey and all HIV-positive mothers, please respond, "God of hope, keep us strong."

ALL: God of hope, keep us strong.

Reader 2: My name is Jean Bosco. I am from Rwanda, and I am HIV-positive. When I was 7, and my brother Mukwiye (moo-kwee-yea) was 2, my father died of AIDS. Seven years later, my mother died. At 14, I became the head of our household. I was able to finish primary school, but do not have the resources to attend secondary. I am working hard so my brother can complete his schooling. At home I wired a tiny light bulb to an old motorcycle battery so he can do his homework at night. Fortunately, a local organization now pays for Mukwiye's school fees. There is hope for him.

For Jean and all children affected by HIV, please respond, "God of hope, help us learn."

ALL: God of hope, help us learn.

Reader 3: My name is Mary, and I live in the countryside of Maua, in Kenya. I am married with two children, ages 6 and 12. I developed health problems a few years ago, and they worsened from stomach pains to pneumonia and tuberculosis. I was diagnosed as HIV-positive. Eventually, my life was falling away. I could not even cook or clean my house. I would sit at home, feeling all hope was gone. My friends deserted me. It was like they were just waiting to hear that I had died. My greatest concern was what would happen to my children. Recently, though, I was able to enroll with an antiretroviral therapy project, and my health has improved greatly. I have been able to plant beans, collect firewood, fetch and carry water home, all in one day. It is amazing. In these few months I have seen so much good and I know it will only get better. Now I know I will live to see my children grow.

For Mary and all families living with HIV, please respond, "God of hope, live within us."

ALL: God of Hope, live within us.

Reader 1: My name is Rani. I live in the state of Andhra Pradesh in India. Six years ago I went to my grandmother's place. My uncle abused me, but I didn't tell anyone because I thought it was wrong. As time went on, I would get frequent fevers and coughs. Last year I came down with a bad cough and I was tested and found HIV-positive. I am 14 years old. My uncle died of AIDS two years ago. I am now in tenth grade, and besides my parents and my aunt, I keep my status hidden from most in my life. The stigma of having the disease is too great. For help, I turned to St. Paul's Trust, a local center. There I receive medicines and vitamins to keep me healthy, and also counseling. The people are very supportive. My parents are happy to see me healthy now, although I know they still worry.

For Rani, and all those who suffer from the stigma of HIV, please respond, "God of hope, grant us peace."

ALL: God of hope, grant us peace.

Reader 2: O God, whose name is love, these are our stories. Let them penetrate our hearts, so that every statistic can carry a name, so that we may never grow numb to the hopes of your people. Gracious God, may these stories unveil your light of hope, in the midst of darkness. May that hope spread to all those affected by HIV throughout the world.

(The next passage is read while the candle lights are spread through the congregation.)

Reader 3: A reading from the prophet Isaiah:

No longer shall the sun be your light by day,
Nor the brightness of the moon shine upon you at night;
The LORD shall be your light forever, your God shall be your glory.

No longer shall your sun go down, or your moon withdraw,
For the LORD will be your light forever,
And the days of your mourning shall be at an end.

(At this time, you can choose to have either an extended moment of silence, or to invite a speaker to share his or her reflections on the pandemic.)

(Option 1)

Reader 1: May the flame of hope that we share, continue to spread throughout our community and the world. At this time, let us take a moment of silence for all people who are positively living with HIV.

(Option 2)

Reader 1: May the flame of hope that we share, continue to spread throughout our community and the world. As a manifestation of that light, it is my great honor to invite to share his/her reflections on the HIV pandemic.

Reader 2: It is far too easy for us to become jaded to the needs of our brothers and sisters who live with HIV and AIDS. We hear the tolls of their pain, but against our best judgment we grow lax and comfortable. This is the time of year when we can recommit ourselves to their service. This is the time when we can lay down our passivity, in order to take up our solidarity with the world. If you are so willing, I invite you to recite with me the following prayer of commitment.

All: Today and for the months ahead I commit ...

To denounce all intolerance, bigotry and injustice against those affected by HIV.

To not turn a jaded eye to news reports on the disease, but rather to educate myself so I may become a stronger advocate for the HIV community.

To ensure, within my area of influence, that all affected by HIV and AIDS might access compassionate, nonjudgmental care, respect and support, regardless of their religion, nationality, gender, lifestyle or sexual orientation.

To work unreservedly to overcome cultural, legal or other systems that disempower and silence women and children while increasing their burden of care, guilt and blame.

To witness, in my life, that no one is a stranger or outsider.

(Based on selections from CAFOD, 2001)

Reader 2: In your presence, good and loving God, we make these commitments. Help us to be true to our words, and if we falter, grant us the endurance to continue once more. Bless us as we go forth this evening, and may our actions become living signs of your hope in our interconnected world. This we pray in your name...

All: Amen

(At this time the bell ceases to toll. Candles are blown out, and the congregation is invited to visit the information table.)

2008 WORLD AIDS DAY

Candlelight Vigil of Hope

“No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were. Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.”

John Donne, 1624

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Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise



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