

Archbishop of Canterbury: Statement on HIV/AIDS for World Aids Day 2006

As Christians we pray this day in the light of a global disaster the momentum of which has built for 25 years. Since the first appearance of the pandemic an estimated 65 million people have been infected with HIV, of whom 25 million have died. In 2005 alone an estimated 4.1 million people became infected with HIV and an estimated 2.8 million people have died of AIDS related illnesses. This pandemic has reached alarming proportions, affecting and infecting many who have not the knowledge or the personal autonomy to avoid transmission. It is now women and young people who face the highest rates of infection; the most vulnerable who bear the heaviest burden.

No Church has found it easy to confront the realities of this HIV crisis. The cultural and social context of the spread of this disease has challenged us to face some uncomfortable realities of sexual behaviour. We have struggled to balance the moral tensions inherent in preventing disease whilst maintaining sexual discipline. Anglicans and other faith communities are however working tirelessly to meet the needs of the dying and to organize themselves to roll back the advance of this disease. As Christian disciples we recognize in God a self-offering in the face of suffering. We are thus compelled to address our responsibility to do what we can to treat the sick and to educate ourselves and others so as to avoid further spread of the infection.

The disease is not stopped by our best intentions or even by marriage. Each person must take responsibility for knowing their HIV status and making sure that others who may be affected also know their status. Such honesty in relationships is a witness to the radical and self-giving love which is daily required of us.

It is too easy to assume that HIV is something which infects someone else and not us. That is the first step that leads to stigma. I pay tribute to those church leaders who have courageously brought their HIV+ status to the attention of their communities and the public and those church leaders who support them. They have confronted us with a reminder of the scale of infection and overturned some of the myths which surround the transmission of the virus. Christ welcomes all to his embrace. We must banish any stigma that keeps us at a distance.

I stand with all the archbishops of our Communion in offering what we can to create a generation free from HIV and AIDS.

Anglicans are working hard to develop further our organizational capacity so that effective projects can be identified and funded. I call upon the Global Fund and other donors to recognise the enormous contribution that could be made in fighting this pandemic by working in better partnership with us. We are currently seeking opportunities for such global partnership with our ecumenical partners. In March 2007 representatives from throughout the Communion will gather in South Africa to further deliberate on our commitment and capacity to development the fight against the spread of HIV. If the international community is to fulfil its commitments to reversing the spread

of HIV and treating those with AIDS, then the Anglican Church will continue to extend itself to meet this challenge as an integral part of it.