

**A Fresh Commitment to End the Ignorance, Stigma and Isolation of HIV/AIDS**  
**Reverend David Coffey, President of the Baptist World Alliance**  
**Friday, December 1, 2006**

Today is World AIDS Day. Around the world there have been special seminars and public gatherings to call attention to the fact that forty million individuals have HIV. Among those infected are members of our own Baptist community. Yet HIV/AIDS is not just a one time a year issue. It is a global issue that demands our attention throughout they year.

We have made strides in 2006 to focus on the devastating reality of the disease. This past summer, a resolution was passed at our General Council meeting in Mexico City that stated the Baptist World Alliance's commitment to fighting the pandemic 365 days a year. We are putting together a database of Baptist organizations and individuals that are working to both prevent and combat the disease. The hope is that this can be used for networking purposes as a way of sharing ideas and encouragement. Additionally, Baptist World Aid has made both the approval and funding of projects addressing HIV/AIDS a priority.

Personally, I have made a pledge to profile HIV/AIDS during my presidency. Tangibly this has translated to visiting different ministries around the world and meeting with those living with HIV.

The strength of being a Baptist is knowing you are not alone. We are a global community and fighting HIV/AIDS is something that we can, and should, do together. Thinking and caring for those living with AIDS takes commitment. May I suggest we make the time for this. Make it a priority. Meeting people living with HIV, their families and Baptists working on AIDS issues should be a priority. Simply listening to their stories, praying with them, is a powerful encouragement and a blessing to your own life. I have done this in my own ministry and invite you to join me in making it a priority commitment

AIDS is a global problem and the stigma and discrimination are worldwide. I meet people living with HIV on my travels; I embrace them and eat with them. I visit churches where their declared policy is to openly welcome all HIV-positive individuals and their family members. In these churches all are welcome to come for prayer, discipleship, and most of all, encouragement. I welcome the initiative launched today by Baptists living with HIV to set up a network for support and encouragement. I thank those of you who are Baptists living with HIV and have had the courage to declare your status to your family and congregation; you are an example to all. I encourage church leaders and church members to reach out to one another in Christian fellowship and love. Jesus gave us a new commandment to love one another as he had loved us. He said when we fulfill this commandment of love, then the world will know we are his true followers (John 13:34-35).

**Let's make a fresh commitment to the new commandment of Jesus  
and end ignorance, stigma and isolation**