



CABSA

## **AIDS CANDLELIGHT MEMORIAL SERVICE SUGGESTIONS** **16<sup>th</sup> May 2021: Seventh Sunday of Easter**

**Theme: We REMEMBER, We TAKE ACTION, We LIVE BEYOND HIV**

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### **1. Introduction**

This will be the second year that we commemorate AIDS Candlelight Memorial Sunday while simultaneously we are still experiencing the Covid-pandemic. It is of utmost importance that we adhere to the current regulations of social distancing, always wearing masks and the emergency rules that defines gatherings, including church services, as prescribed by our different countries.

The immediate need and urgency of the COVID-pandemic, unfortunately, does NOT mean that the HIV-epidemic no longer exists.

With more than 37 million people globally living with HIV, it remains a serious health challenge that threatens not only our physical lives but also our emotional and spiritual well-being. It is a silent epidemic in the sense that though millions of lives are impacted by it, so many people continue to carry this burden in silence and loneliness, mostly in fear of stigma and judgment.

We as faith communities, therefore, have a responsibility, amidst the challenges and dangers of COVID-19, to also remember people living with HIV. This includes those who live openly with their status, those whom we know personally, but also the millions we do not know, and especially those of us who feel too exposed and vulnerable to disclose our status.

#### **The joint HIV and COVID-19 epidemics**

The first commonly known occurrence of what is now known as COVID-19 was in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. The World Health Organisation declared it a public health emergency January 30<sup>th</sup> and a pandemic on March 11<sup>th</sup>.

At the time of writing, more than 152 million people have tested positive for COVID-19 infection and more than 3.1 million people have died.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Downloaded on 2 May 2021 from Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center  
<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

On World AIDS Day, December 1<sup>st</sup> 2019, UNAIDS released the following HIV statistics for 2018: The estimated number of people living with HIV were 37.9 million people, the number of new infections 1.7 million and AIDS-related deaths 770 000.<sup>2</sup>

The statistics for HIV and COVID-19 are not gathered in the same manner. For COVID-19 scientists use actual confirmed cases and for HIV UNAIDS and WHO statistics are estimations based on the extrapolation of country-specific data. Nevertheless, these global statistics inform us of the scale and urgency of both pandemics. The rapid spread of COVID-19 should rightfully be a reason for serious concern that calls for emergency responses.

When we look at country-specific details, the realities could be much different, but this too has the potential to change quickly. In South Africa, for instance, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases on May 2<sup>nd</sup> is 1 582 842 people of whom 54 406 people have died.<sup>3</sup>

The estimated 2018 HIV statistics for South Africa report 7.7 million people living with HIV, of which 240 000 were new infections and 71 000 people died in that year.<sup>4</sup> These deaths equate to an average of 190 AIDS-related deaths per day.

When we plan our Candlelight Memorial activities or feel unsure of the importance of still addressing HIV during the COVID-epidemic, let us keep these numbers in mind<sup>5</sup>. Let the statistics remind us that in a time of disruption for the entire world and us personally, these statistics represent the permanently disrupted lives of loved ones, women and men, spouses, siblings, parents, children, friends, neighbours and colleagues. Let us remember and remind others to also take action.

### **The purpose of Candlelight Memorial**

“The International AIDS Candlelight Memorial is much more than just a memorial. It serves as a community mobilisation campaign to raise social consciousness about HIV and AIDS. With almost 38 million people living with HIV today, the International AIDS Candlelight Memorial serves as an important intervention for global solidarity, breaking down barriers of stigma and discrimination, and giving hope to new generations”.<sup>6</sup>

The official Candlelight Memorial website urges us to continue to mark this day as important, but also to find ways of demonstrating individual solidarity without putting people’s lives and health at risk.

CABSA would like to invite you to show your solidarity in at least one of three suggested responses:

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<sup>2</sup> From UNAIDS [https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media\\_asset/UNAIDS\\_FactSheet\\_en.pdf](https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/UNAIDS_FactSheet_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Downloaded 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2021 from South African Government <https://www.gov.za/Coronavirus>

<sup>4</sup> From both UNAIDS and AVERT <https://www.avert.org/professionals/hiv-around-world/sub-saharan-africa/south-africa>

<sup>5</sup> Please keep in mind that the COVID-19 numbers change daily, use Johns Hopkins (note 1) or your local source for updated numbers, should you plan to quote exact numbers.

<sup>6</sup> From Candlelight Memorial <https://www.candlelightmemorial.org/>

- Personal – an appeal to you and other individuals to spend time alone or as household reflecting and praying together about HIV and lighting candles together.
- Faith Communities – faith leaders and faith communities who can stream or prerecord video or audio messages for church services, please consider the following thoughts and prayer in your services. .
- Raise Awareness and Public Solidarity through media and social media platforms.

### **Additional Information on Sunday, the 16<sup>th</sup> of May**

- The Candlelight Memorial theme this year is: **We remember – We take action – We live beyond HIV**
- In the church calendar, it is the seventh Sunday after Passover
- The Revised Common Lectionary's texts are:  
 Psalm 1                      John 17:6-19                      Acts 1:15-17;21-26                      1 John 5:9-13
- A short prayer video clip can be downloaded or viewed here  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1H9TQZepSagvjR74RJZyNqlQyn-SEvPsk/view>

## **2. Candlelight ceremony**

Place four candles in front of the church, one of which should be bigger or more prominent than the other three.

You could invite one person to light all the candles while the liturgist reads the text, or four different people, who would each light a candle. Arrange this before the service.

*First Candle (light the bigger candle first)*

**Liturgist:** As we are reminded of the HIV and Covid epidemics that has devastated so many lives across the world, Lord, we know that we must persevere and keep our focus on You. As we do this, we are also reminded that you are our God. You are the Almighty God, the resurrected Christ, the loving Father and the ever present Holy Spirit. In the midst of this crisis, we turn to you and light this candle to remind us that our Hope is in You.

*Second Candle*

**Liturgist:** We light the second candle in remembrance of the millions of people who have died of AIDS related conditions over the last few decades. We especially also remember those who have died in our midst - our fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, friends, colleagues, employees, and neighbours. In many cases we didn't even know the cause of their deaths. We also want to remember them.

*Third Candle*

**Liturgist:** We light the third candle for the 7.7 million people in South Africa<sup>7</sup> who are currently living with HIV. We specifically also light this candle for those of us in this congregation and this community who are living with HIV, and also for our loved ones.

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<sup>7</sup> Replace this number and reference with the number of people in your own country that are living with HIV, or alternatively with the global figure of 37 million people.

### *Fourth Candle*

**Liturgist:** We light the fourth candle – to keep the focus on HIV, especially for those of us who have become weary of the topic. Even more so for those of us who still think that HIV is not the concern of the faith community... Let us continue to live life and work to bringing hope and reconciliation in a world with the dual epidemics, HIV and COVID-19.

### ***Let us pray....***

Loving and Caring God,

who never becomes weary and continues to support us:

We are a broken world –

infected and affected by HIV.

We are

sad as we remember loved ones who have passed on,

often powerless when we think of the virus,

angry at systems which continue to keep people powerless and vulnerable.

Bless us

and strengthen us

in order to continue the journey...

Lead us

to experience resurrection and new life.

**AMEN**

## **3. Sermon Guidelines**

### **Texts suggested by Revised Common Lectionary**

Lesson 1: Acts 1:1-11;21-26

Psalm: Psalm 1

Lesson 2: 1 John 5:9-13

Gospel: John 17:6-19

### **John 17:14-19**

FACT: HIV and AIDS continuous to affect sub-Saharan Africa severely. The HIV pandemic is still one of the leading causes of death. Despite progress in research, many people living with HIV in Africa do not receive adequate health care due to factors such as accessibility and affordability of drugs, but also due to HIV/AIDS stigma and discrimination.

Although the church has been active in providing care for people living with HIV, it has also been responsible for some of the challenges they encounter. The tendency to associate HIV with promiscuity or to see it as a form of divine judgment has increased stigma. Consequently, the church often has not become the alternative space where HIV positive people can feel welcome. The church has also not raised its prophetic voice as part of its advocacy work. Access to information, prevention and care is still a prominent challenge and the church should play (re-discover) a meaningful role in this regard.

**Our theme for this year's Aids candlelight memorial service is We REMEMBER, We TAKE ACTION, We LIVE BEYOND HIV.**

This immediately calls to mind an important discourse in the teaching of Jesus and subsequently the Apostles, namely, to live for Others by having a servant heart. As Christians we believe and confess that God calls us to serve Him and other people, to share the truth of the Gospel, to minister to those who are sick and destitute without discrimination and bias.

We believe that God calls us to serve Him and to guard our hearts. Proverbs 4:23 says "Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life." What are we to guard our hearts from?

The answer is anything that will lead us away from God's plan and purpose for us. Our hearts are meant to be different, our motivation is meant to be different, serving God and His purpose for us is meant to be at the center of our lives. We are meant to be different because Jesus has made a difference in our lives.

We are set free, we are saved, we are in the world, but we are not of the world. How can we be in the world, but not of the world?

In John chapter 17 we have a record of a prayer of Jesus.

While praying to the Father, Jesus said of His disciples, His followers, in John 17:14-16, *"I have given them your word. And the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it."*

The word translated "world" in the original text is the Greek word "kosmos", translated in English as "cosmos". Cosmos refers to the inhabited earth and the people who live on the earth, which functions apart from God. 1 John 5:19 reminds us, "We know that we are children of God and that the world (the cosmos) around us is under the control of the evil one."

If the evil one rules in this world, this cosmos, then we can understand why Jesus would say in His prayer that those who believe in Him are no longer of this world. As followers of Jesus, we are no longer ruled by sin, we are not bound by the sinful principles and practices of this world. We are set free from the power of sin, we are set free from the control of the evil one, we are

saved and we are being changed and transformed into the image of Christ. Our interest in the things of the world decreases as we grow closer to God and mature in our Christian lives.

In the world, but not of the world, we are physically present, but not part of its value system, we are set apart from the world.

Being in the world, but not of it, means we have the opportunity to bring light to all people who are experiencing darkness and challenges in their lives. We have the opportunity to challenge systems and processes, institutions, that are causing people to experience the ability to live their lives to the fullest. We are meant to live in a way that shows there is something “different” about us and by so doing bring not only hope, but redress and restitution.

Jesus is laying out for us what the normal Christian life is all about, what it means to remain in God and to be connected to, the way it is supposed to be. Expected to have this kind of relationship with God, expected to love each other and be unified with each other, the way it ought to be. And here is what you can expect when it comes to the world around you. The world hates Jesus. Interesting, isn't it? Think of how loving, caring He is, how could you hate someone like that?

If they hate Jesus, how do you think they will feel about those who identify themselves with him? Hate you as well!

I reiterate, Jesus says in John 17:15 – My prayer is not that you take them out of the world. That is just where I want them, their influence, their presence, to be light in the lives of those around them. In praying for His disciples and ultimately us Jesus continues to pray in John 17:17-19 as follows:

*“Sanctify (Greek: hagiason—set apart as sacred to God—make holy—consecrate) them by the truth; your word (Greek: logos) is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify (Greek: hagiozo) myself, that they too may be sanctified (Greek: hegiasmenoi).”*

We cannot perform our mission of witnessing to the love of the Father in this world unless we ourselves are holy. While the Jews were concerned for the physical wholeness of the animals they set apart for sacrifice, Jesus' concern is that his disciples should be spiritually whole - holy.

Being holy in an unholy *cosmos* (world) was fatal for Jesus, and we should understand that it might be dangerous for us too. Jesus calls for the Father to “sanctify (the disciples) in the truth”-equipping them for their difficult work.

**“As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world”** (v. 18). Jesus is not of this world but emptied himself so that he might take on human form and live in the *cosmos*-world on a mission of mercy and salvation. Now he is preparing the disciples, us, to continue this

incarnational ministry in a world that will often require them to take up their crosses to follow Him.

The passage emphasizes the need to trust in the Lord. As opposed to arrogance and a false sense of self-sufficiency or even worse, apathy, the church should be a trusting community. Even when HIV and AIDS threatens our future, the church should remain firm. Facing ridicule because of our stance on HIV and its impact on our brothers and sisters living with HIV and AIDS, we of faith should not falter in the face of adversity.

How do we apply the Word to ourselves?

- We should ask ourselves how often we have sinned by taking God's throne and pronounced judgment on people who are living with HIV?
- What can members, our church, do to welcome HIV positive people, and other marginalized groups into our places of worship?
- Do our members still trust in God, even as some of us bury loved ones almost daily?
- The church should play a leading role in fighting discrimination and other factors that increase vulnerability to HIV infection.

Psalm 1:1-3 reads: "Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law, day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers.

Amen

## **4. Closing Prayer**

**Wholeness (by John van de Laar<sup>1</sup>)**

God, whose word spoke life and creativity into a formless universe,

and order to a nation of escaped slaves,

whose strong and compassionate voice challenged injustice through frail prophets,

we praise you.

Jesus, whose touch smoothed the broken skin of lepers,

and brought a bleeding woman back to health and belonging,

whose hand raised dead girls, and refused to throw stones at prostitutes,

we praise you.

Spirit, whose breath restores souls and bodies,

and whose presence comforts the grieving,

whose fire ignites compassion within us for the healing of the nations,

we praise you.  
God of wholeness,  
we celebrate the healing you bring to us and our world,  
and we celebrate the promised wholeness  
that awaits all of creation  
in your eternal reign.  
**Amen.**

## 5. Blessing

**Romans 15:13** Now may God, the source of hope, fill you with all joy and peace as you believe, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>ii</sup>

## 6. Suggestions for Hymns

### For I'm building a people of power <sup>iii</sup>

For I'm building a people of power  
For I'm making a people of praise  
That will move through  
this land by My Spirit  
And will glorify  
My precious Name

Build Your church Lord  
Make us strong Lord  
Join our hearts Lord  
Through Your Son  
Make us one Lord  
In Your body  
In the kingdom of Your Son

### Jesus, Remember <sup>iv</sup>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGB2E0NzO2A>

Jesus Remember Me, When You Come Into Your Kingdom  
Jesus Remember Me, When You Come Into Your Kingdom

Jesus Remember Me, When You Come Into Your Kingdom  
Jesus Remember Me, When You Come Into Your Kingdom

"I Assure, This Day You Will Be With Me,



This Day You Will Be, With Me In Paradise."

Jesus Remember Me, When You Come Into Your Kingdom  
Jesus Remember Me, When You Come Into Your Kingdom

### **Tuma Mina<sup>v</sup>**

Zulu:

1 Thuma mina, thuma mina,  
thuma mina, Nkosi yam.

English:

1 Send me, Lord, send me, Lord,  
send me, Lord, into the world.

2 Lead me, Lord, lead me, Lord,  
lead me, Lord, into the world.

3 Teach me, Lord, teach me, Lord,  
teach me, Lord, your holy Word.

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**AIDS Candlelight Memorial Resources Provided by CABSA and developed in partnership with the AIDS Task Group of Diaconia.**

You are encouraged to share this information.

Prepared by Rev Sean Esterhuizen and Aneleh Fourie Le Roux

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<sup>i</sup> [http://www.sacredise.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=33:wholeness&catid=1:allprayers](http://www.sacredise.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=33:wholeness&catid=1:allprayers)

<sup>ii</sup> The Holy Bible: International Standard Version (ISV)

<sup>iii</sup> Music and Lyrics Copyright © 1977 [Thankyou Music tvm@kingsway.co.uk](mailto:Thankyou Music tvm@kingsway.co.uk)

<sup>iv</sup> [Taizé](#)

<sup>v</sup> [http://www.hymnary.org/text/send\\_me\\_jesus](http://www.hymnary.org/text/send_me_jesus)