

Guidelines for AIDS Candlelight Service

Compiled and Distributed by CABSAs and Diaconia AIDS Task Group

Date: Sunday 21 May 2023 (Seventh Sunday of Easter)

Focus text: John 17: 1 - 11

“Be of One Heart and Mind”



1. Words of Welcome

Welcome to our AIDS Candlelight Memorial Service. This memorial is held each year on the third Sunday in May. This is a time when we remember people who have died from AIDS-related illnesses and people who are living with HIV; a time to give thanks for the progress that has been made and to reflect on what still needs to be done. It is an opportunity for people around the world to unite to eradicate HIV and to show support for people living with HIV. It is a time to commit anew to ensure that no one is left behind.

2. Call to Worship

Loving and compassionate God, we come before you today to remember people whose lives have been impacted by HIV and AIDS, to reflect on the progress which has been made, as well as what more needs to be done. We are committed to the global goals of Zero New Infections, Zero AIDS Related Deaths, and Zero Stigma and Discrimination. We are making every effort to end AIDS as a public health crisis by the year 2030. We thank you for the progress which has been made to slow, reverse and prevent the spread of HIV, to mitigate its impact on families and communities, and to build welcoming and caring communities for all.

This progress is the fruit of the divine gifts of reason, intelligence, good judgment, and spiritual inspiration that you have bestowed upon the millions of scientists, health care providers, mental health and social workers, pastoral caregivers, activists and members of civil society, and people directly impacted and affected by this disease, who are all doing their part to end the pandemic.

Grant us the strength Lord, to face the many challenges that confront us on our journey as HIV and AIDS continue to challenge us to break down barriers between “us” and “them,” as well as to challenge our own judgment that leads to stigmatization, discrimination and the violation of human rights. Lord, help us to recognize the need to examine our spiritual life, the practice in our attitude responding to Key Affected Populations, and to ensure fuller inclusion and participation of brothers and sisters who are living with HIV and AIDS.

We pray for our brothers and sisters who live with HIV and at the same time seek their active participation in the life of the interfaith community, which will enrich our spiritual experience and bridge the gap between our religious teachings and the everyday realities of life in general. AMEN.

3. Song: “In Moments Like These”

In moments like these, I sing out a song; I sing out a love song to Jesus. In moments like these, I lift up my hands; I lift up my hands to the Lord, singing I love you Lord, singing, I love you Lord, singing, I love you . . . Lord, I love you.

4. The Greeting

Leader: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

All: And also with you.

Leader: May the God who calls us to unity and the fullness of life and love, unite you all.

All: Amen

5. The Gathering Prayer

Leader: God who comes alongside and lives within, we thank You for the privilege of being together at this time and in this place.

All: We thank You.

Leader: We pray that Your love will unite us into a community of grace and discovery. Please cleanse from us anything that would sap our strength for togetherness. Free us from negative thoughts and the barriers that sometimes keep us apart. At this time, refresh in us the dream of a better world and put before us new possibilities for service.

All: Lord, hear us.

Leader: Renew in us Your compassion so that we may be a people with loving purposes. We come together to be Your halleluiah in a troubled world.

All: Amen.

6. Prayer of Confession

Arrange beforehand with men and women (any number that you wish) to do the readings. Before the Prayer, all participants to light small candles and place them in front of a Cross draped with a red ribbon that symbolizes the remembrance of our friends, brothers or sisters who are living with the realities of HIV and AIDS.

All: I am somebody, I have the right to live.

Woman: I may be HIV positive, but I have the right to essential medicine.

Man: I may be a sex worker, or a drug addict, but I am accepted and loved by God.

Woman: I may be a single mother, living with HIV, but I have a right to be treated with dignity.

All: I am God's child.

Man: I may be poor, but I have a right to healthy food and clean water.

Woman: I may be different from you, but I have a right to be safe.

Man: I may be dying, but I have a right to receive dignified care and support.

All: I am God's child. I can raise my head. I can work for justice. I may be without my legs, but with God, I can stand tall, because my redemption is near. I am somebody. We are all God's children. We all have a right to live.¹

7. Song: Kyrie Eleison (Lord, have mercy) or song of choice

8. The Lighting of Candles (All stand)

Reader 1: We live in much darkness. We are often uncertain. We are sometimes afraid. In acknowledging this darkness, we light a candle of hope.
(The first candle is lighted.)

Reader 2: We all have sorrows. We suffer pain and hardship. Each of us carries regrets we have. We light a candle as prayer for forgiveness.
(The second candle is lighted.)

Reader 3: We are sometimes lonely, and the world seems cold and hard. In our loneliness, we light a candle of love.
(The third candle is lighted.)

Reader 4: We have known awe, wonder, mystery and glimmerings of perfection in our imperfect world. In our wonder, we light a candle of praise.
(The fourth candle is lighted.)

Reader 5: May our separate lights become one flame, that together we may be nourished by its glow.²

All: The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, Who art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy Will be done,
on earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are Yours, now and forever. Amen.**

9. The Prayer for Illumination

¹ Prayer by Grace Moon – Christian Conference of Asia

² Source: An Interfaith Celebration of Love

Heavenly Father, we approach your Holy Word with awe today for we aim to listen in on the precious prayer that our Saviour spoke. Open our hearts that we may pray with Him attentively and sensitively. And, having prayed with Him, may we learn how to pray better ourselves. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

10. Scripture reading: John 17: 1 – 11

Sermon Notes:

Though some may assume that Jesus prayed these words in the Garden of Gethsemane, John makes it clear the location is still the upper room. All of John 13-17 took place there. Note that John 18:1 indicates that Jesus left the upper room and went to Gethsemane after this prayer was completed.

As we listen to Jesus pray, two impressions may come to us: Jesus had a very close and intimate relationship with His Father, and Jesus had been faithful in obedience to His mission.

John wants us to SEE Jesus, and to see Jesus is to see The One who sent Him. To see the glory, honour, majesty, purpose and worth of The One who sent Jesus, and not just sent Him, but who is also IN Him.

This is eternal life. To see in Jesus the source of true life. The only true God. This revelation of glory, of the presence of God, is the work of Jesus.

Notice that those who belong to Jesus were NOT "converted" by Him. They already belonged to God and God gave them to Jesus. The relationship is not created by Jesus. The relationship is realized, enhanced, but it is not created - it is a given.

This is good news. It is the news that our relationship with God is given by God as the starting point, not an end point.

It is also hard news, because it means that WE do not get to choose who God is in relationship with, and that means that if we want to be in relationship with God, we must also be in relationship, unity, with those whom God has already chosen to be in relationship with - whether we like them or not, whether we agree with God's choices or not.

How can we love these people chosen by God, in the same way that Jesus loves us? They may be our neighbours, but possibly also our enemies?

The quality and authenticity of our relationship with one another is to mirror the relationship between Jesus and His Father. This is our purpose, "to be of one heart and mind. As we are one heart and mind." (The message)

11. Our Affirmation of Faith

**My only comfort in life and death is
that I am not my own but belong -
body and soul,
in life and death -
to my faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ.**

He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood,
and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.
He also watches over me in such a way
that not a hair can fall from my head
without the will of my Father in heaven;
in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.

Because I belong to Him,
Christ, by His Holy Spirit,
He assures me of eternal life
and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready
from now on to live for Him.

12. Benediction

All: Gracious and loving God, you are the fountain of life, the cleansing spring and the well that never dries up. Forgive us for falling short of our calling to be agents of healing – when we manifest instead our brokenness, division, prejudice and pride. Look kindly on our shortcomings and heal our infirmities of body and spirit. Refresh us through Your Holy Spirit that we may strive to become agents of Your healing touch for Your world. Amen.