

HIV & AIDS

News and Views from the United Methodist Global AIDS Fund
and the General Board of Church and Society



March-April 2021 UMGAC Newsletter

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Word from Bishop Julius Trimble, UMGAC Chair



Greetings to you during this Holy Lenten Season! Lent is a time of waiting. Lent is a time of seeking. Lent is a time of quiet contemplation about our faith, our lives and our world. Lent, in its solemnity, might open a window for us to think deeply about the life of Jesus, his ministry and his abiding love for all God's children. Jesus walked with the sick, the poor, those living with stigma and discrimination. I love Jesus because of that. But his life makes mine more challenging, because sometimes it's hard living the way Jesus did. Perhaps you find this to be true in your lives as well. I find myself pushed and pulled in many directions throughout the day and so yearn for moments for quiet reflection. Sometimes that busyness takes over, and I "fall from grace". Lord, help me. Lord, help us all be more aware of those around us who yearn for a listening

ear, an open heart and a forgiving spirit. I'm reminded of Mozambique's Rev. Arlindo's plea during a recent UMGAC call when he said "The world needs a theology of care and compassion." So true. Let's work to make that happen. Be encouraged.

Please join us for our April 1st webinar entitled: "Prevention Tools and HIV and AIDS"

This UMGAC webinar will share important information about preventing the spread of the HIV virus, a high priority for The United Methodist Church. Thirty-eight million people in the world were living with HIV at the end of 2019, according to the World Health Organization, and 1.7 million people were newly infected that year.

The presenters will be Dr. Jacquelyn Kissel, Pharmacist with Equitas Health Pharmacy and Medical Center in Columbus, OH and Joshua Culbertson, a PrEP patient with Equitas Health and a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center Harding Hospital and Linda Bales Todd as moderator.

The panel will discuss various prevention techniques with an emphasis on Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)--medicine that can prevent HIV infection when taken daily by people who do not have HIV, but who are at very high risk of getting the disease. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, PrEP is highly effective for preventing HIV when taken as prescribed. The webinar will share information about PrEP and other prevention tools, including the benefits of female condoms, along with suggestions for what faith communities can do to help prevent the spread of the virus.

The webinar will be broadcast on **Facebook Live at 2 p.m. ET April 1st** at <https://www.facebook.com/umcglobalaidsfund> and made available on the UMGAC website at <https://umgaf2014.wordpress.com>. Past webinars are also available on the website. [Press Release](#).



UMGAC Sponsors Conversations with AIDS Representatives from Africa and the Philippines

In February, two separate zoom calls were held with UMGAC members and persons from United Methodist Annual Conferences in Mozambique, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo and the Philippines who shared information on HIV and AIDS ministries, challenges and opportunities. In all four annual conferences, programming is happening to address the HIV crisis, but also in all four areas there continues to be a need for committed leadership at all levels of the church in order to make more progress especially in combatting stigma. Tragically, homophobia exists as well as misinformation about HIV and AIDS which compounds the discrimination against those living with the viruses.

Cote d'Ivoire is focusing efforts on all populations with an emphasis on orphans. There are 476,000 orphans in the country and some churches are adopting these children. Funds are needed to support training, legal assistance, education. The Annual Conference has 2 full time staff plus 3 volunteers working on HIV & AIDS. Micro-enterprises for people to obtain income are being launched by the Annual Conference which are bringing hope to many. Fortunately, anti-retrovirals (ARV's) are free, but COVID-19 severely impacted access to treatment not only for HIV but other diseases as well.

Central Congo Annual Conference is working to educate men about HIV including the importance of testing. Pregnant women and sex workers are also being impacted. A focus on prevention by the Health Boards is making a difference but more awareness is needed along with increased testing and better equipped health facilities. COVID-19 is impacting access to health care and education, and donors are shifting their emphasis to COVID rather than HIV & AIDS.

Mozambique is experiencing resistance among men who are not being tested or treated. The conference has mobilized teams of people to visit HIV or AIDS patients and work with partners in the area. Pastors need to be educated about HIV and AIDS and, according to Rev. Arlindo Romao, Administrator of Chicucque Hospital, we (Mozambique and the entire UMC) need to develop a "theology of compassion and care" rather than judgment. COVID-19 has resulted in fewer people accessing the hospital for treatment and other health concerns.

The **Philippines** Annual Conferences engage in ongoing education and advocacy for HIV & AIDS and work closely with the National Council of Churches. Peer awareness programs have been established, as have testing and counseling centers along with psycho/social support services. A serious need is for more human sexuality education including HIV and AIDS in schools and churches. Additionally, stigma, homophobia impede progress resulting in a clarion call for pastors and other leaders to help address these concerns. COVID has resulted in travel restrictions and, as of this date, no vaccines have been distributed.

UMGAC expresses deep appreciation to all those who participated in these recent conversations and are grateful for their ministry.

"Hanging Up My Spurs" by Linda Bales Todd



Saying farewell was such sweet sorrow. Since UMGAC's beginning (2004), I was a part of this initiative either by lending staff support while working at the General Board of Church & Society, and, in more recent years, serving as the part-time consultant to the initiative. March 15th was my final day with UMGAC, and I left with both sadness and

hope. Being in ministry with my UMGAC colleagues has been a blessing of unbelievable proportions; but, God has called me toward self care, reflection and unfulfilled dreams, and I *dare* not ignore this nudging!

UMGAC emerged during a time of great need for education and advocacy on an issue that had been neglected by the church while infections and deaths kept increasing around the globe. Infections in women were seriously escalating, and the plight of millions of orphans continued taking its toll. The UMC needed to step up to the plate and, fortunately, it did but, even today, it needs to do more!

As I reflect on lessons learned, there is one word that floats to the top: STIGMA. Far too many people in the church and society cast aspersions on people living with HIV or AIDS. Far too many people can't find it in their hearts to believe that ALL God's people are of sacred worth. Far too many people mis-interpret the holy texts to justify positions of condemnation and discrimination. These actions break my heart and are causing great harm. Recently, I had the privilege of being on a call with Rev. Arlindo Ramao from Mozambique who proclaimed that the church needs to adopt a "Theology of Compassion and Care"! Alleluia for truth-tellers like Rev. Arlindo!

So, as I bid you adieu, I thank UMGAC for its work and will continue being its cheerleader. One last thought: Howard Thurman wrote about dreams "...a dream becomes for us the bearer of a new possibility, the enlarged horizon, the great hope. Even as it romps among the constellations, it comes back to its place in our lives and in its fulfillment reflects the radiance of the far heights, the lofty regions, and gives to our day the lift and magin of the stars!" Peace be upon you all as we continue working toward a world where all people are healthy and whole.



Job Posting: UMGAC Part-time Consultant. Deadline for application, April 15th.
Click [here](#) for info.

Advocacy News:

On Thursday, March 11, 2021, President Joseph Biden signed the [American Rescue Plan Act](#) that includes \$3.5 billion to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and \$250 million for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief to mitigate the pandemic's impacts on global HIV control efforts and to prevent, prepare for and respond to coronavirus in developing countries. This is good news!

Resources:

[HIV and AIDS Prevention Tools Handout](#)

Article: [Why is the United States Lagging Behind Other Advance Nations in Controlling HIV?](#)

Upcoming National/International AIDS Awareness Days

Several new observation days have been added for our commemoration. To find a complete list, click [here](#).

A closing Lenten reflection....

A Scandal in the Suburbs by X. J. Kennedy

We had to have him put away,
For what if he'd grown vicious?
To play faith healer, give away
Stale bread and stinking fishes!
His soapbox preaching set the tongues
Of all the neighbors going.
Odd stuff: how lilies never spin
And birds don't bother sowing.
Why, bums were coming to the door—
His pockets had no bottom—
And then-the foot-wash from that whore!
We signed. They came and got him.

The United Methodist Global AIDS Committee was organized in 2004 as an interagency initiative of The United Methodist Church. It provides education and advocacy on the issues of HIV & AIDS. Members of the Committee represent the following United Methodist agencies: Council of Bishops, General Board of Global Ministries, General Board of Church & Society, United Methodist Women, United Methodist Communication and Discipleship Ministries.

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