

**AIDS : a Christian response from the Metropolitan Community Church /
written by the Reverend Stephen A. Pieters.**

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aids:

A
Christian
Response

from
Metropolitan
Community
Church

WHAT IS ACQUIRED IMMUNE DEFICIENCY SYNDROME?

Aids is a poorly understood impairment of the body's immune system which occurs in previously healthy individuals. While this impairment affects only a portion of the immune system, affected individuals are left vulnerable to illnesses which might not otherwise occur. These illnesses are referred to as opportunistic infections, and can be fatal.

WHAT IS THE UFMCC?

The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches is an international denomination of Christian churches. It is noted primarily for its special identification with the Lesbian and Gay Community. We believe in God's unconditional love and acceptance of all people, regardless of sexual orientation, race, gender, or color.

WHAT HAS THE UFMCC SAID ABOUT AIDS?

We commit ourselves to be vigilant, outspoken opponents of any theology that even suggests that any disease is God's divine earthly retribution against any individual or group; and we resolve to preach, teach, and proclaim God's loving, healing power and desire for our health and happiness.

—from Resolution #12
General Conference XII
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

The General Conference further called the Fellowship to active Pastoral Care and leadership in education, political activism, and social responsibility in response to the aids crisis.

SO WHERE IS GOD IN THE AIDS CRISIS?

God is with Persons with aids (PWA's), helping them cope, and giving them hope in the face of a deadly disease. We know God to be on the side of the oppressed. God loves Lesbians and Gay men. God loves persons with aids. God does not give any individual or any group of people a disease as a punishment. God wants our health and happiness.

CAN AIDS BE HEALED?

We believe in a healing God. Jesus is the Great Healer, and offers believers physical as well as spiritual healing.

For PWA's, healing can mean the remission of cancers, the regeneration of healthy tissue, and the restoration of a fully functioning immune system. There are people who are living with this disease several years after diagnosis. God is greater than this or any other disease.

Sometimes physical healing does not happen for a believing Christian. Spiritual healing can still occur, and is a real experience for many PWA's, even in the midst of rigorous physical ailments.

Healing can be experienced even as one dies. Healing does not necessarily mean being rescued from death. Healing can mean feeling the peace that passes all understanding at the moment of death. Healing can be the affirmation of life in the face of death. Healing happens when fear is replaced by love.

WHAT IS GOD DOING IN ALL OF THIS?

God is challenging the Lesbian and Gay community to come together as a stronger people in the face of this deadly epidemic. God is calling us to combat homophobia. God is making a judgment on oppression, which creates the stressful conditions that allow disease to take hold and flourish. The stress of being a member of an oppressed minority group such as the Lesbian and Gay community makes one more susceptible to disease.

God is challenging Gay men to re-examine what it means to be intimate. We are called at this time to re-examine our responsibilities as sex-positive people.

We in the Fellowship are called at this time to re-examine our responsibilities to one another and to the larger community as a family of faith.

WHAT IS IT LIKE FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE AIDS?

When a disease like aids is diagnosed, several things can happen:

- Extreme fatigue, weight loss, and sometimes physical disfigurement.
- Loneliness and depression.
- Anger, directed at the most convenient target.
- Profound spiritual questions.
- Overwhelming legal, financial, and medical decisions.
- Direct confrontation with questions of Gay Pride.
- Fear of pain, physical deterioration, and death.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM PERSONS WITH AIDS?

We all can learn a great deal from PWA's about courage and dignity in the face of the most overwhelming challenge of a lifetime. Some PWA's develop a spiritual centeredness which can be instructive to any well person.

The confrontation with death which most PWA's experience can help anyone tune into life. As a person with aids opens to the dying process with love and compassion, the persons around the PWA are confronted with basic issues of their own lives and deaths, making real the saying, "*It is in dying that we rise to new life*". Some PWA's experience a joy and a peace that is surprising to well people who have never met anyone with a life-threatening illness. We can all learn inspiring lessons of faith from PWA's.

In the midst of the aids crisis, we can learn invaluable lessons about Lesbian/Gay pride, community, faith, and most importantly, we can learn about loving our neighbor as ourselves.

WHAT CAN THE LOCAL CHURCH DO?

- Offer pastoral care and counseling to PWA's, and to those around them.

- Provide nutritional support and household services to PWA's.
- Provide support groups for PWA's, their partners and friends.
- Sponsor fundraising activities for research, education and direct financial aid to PWA's.
- Conduct educational programs to inform individuals about aids.

WHAT CAN AN INDIVIDUAL DO?

- Volunteer time at a local aids project.
- Financially support local aids research or patient relief and services.
- Be present to a PWA; be a companion.
- Be a patient advocate: legal, financial, and medical bureaucracy can be overwhelming.
- Help with household tasks, chores, errands.
- Create a pleasant environment for a PWA.
- Share a good laugh.

HOW CAN WE MAKE OURSELVES LESS SUSCEPTIBLE?

- Limit the number of sexual partners.
- Avoid the exchange of fecal matter, semen, blood, and urine.
- Use condoms.
- Regular exercise.
- Good balanced nutrition.
- Plenty of rest.
- Reduce stress.
- Reduce the use of drugs, tobacco, and alcohol.
- Practice proper hygiene; wash before and after sex.
- Combat homophobia.
- Know what you believe, and practice your faith.

**REMEMBER - VULNERABILITY TO
DISEASE IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY**

HELPFUL SCRIPTURES

Psalm 13
Psalm 23
Isaiah 41:10
John 9:1-3
Romans 6:3-9
Romans 15:13
I Corinthians 15:51-57
II Corinthians 4:7-18
Matthew 6:25-34

For additional information, contact your local aids project, Shanti Foundation, Metropolitan Community Church, or:

UFMCC
5300 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 304
Los Angeles, CA
(213) 464-5100

FOR FURTHER READING

Levine, Stephen, *Who Dies? An Investigation of Conscious Living and Conscious Dying*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1982.

Graham, Jory. *In the Company of Others: Understanding the Human Needs of Cancer Patients*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982.

Kushner, Harold S. *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. New York: Avon Books, 1981.

FOR FURTHER DETAILS OF THE METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH OF NORTH LONDON

Please write to:- **BM/MCC
LONDON
WC1N 3XX**

Or telephone **081 670 2619**

This pamphlet was written by The Reverend Stephen A. Pieters and reflects his own experience as a person with aids. The Reverend Pieters has served UFMCC congregations in Chicago, Hartford, and North Hollywood.