

# MCC WASHINGTON OFFICE GUIDE TO The Global AIDS Pandemic



MCC's *Generation at Risk* program tells the story of 20-year old Makuru. At the market, Makuru, a chicken vendor, pockets money from his third sale of the day, the merchandise squawking in protest as its buyer carries it home. The money Makuru earns provides food for his young sisters, who live with relatives since their mother died of AIDS. Makuru declines to give his last name because his mother kept her disease a secret from most people in town.

His youngest sister, a 2-year-old, has HIV, and Makuru worries about her health. He and his brother take turns buying soap, rice and fruit for their sisters each week.

Makuru has tested negative for HIV and has convinced some friends—"guys at the market, who I hang out with"—to get HIV tests as well. He carries a key chain with the message: "Love life. Prevent AIDS." ([www.mcc.org/aids/stories](http://www.mcc.org/aids/stories)).

## AIDS Facts

- Approximately 40 million people worldwide are infected with the AIDS virus (Auto-Immune Deficiency Syndrome). 25 million live in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Almost half of infected adults are women; 57 percent in sub-Saharan Africa. Gender and cultural inequalities and lack of education make women especially vulnerable.
- Two and one-half million children under 15 have the AIDS virus. Young people 15–24 years old account for nearly half of all new infections.
- 3 million people died of AIDS in 2003; and an additional 5 million were infected. Every day 8,000 die of AIDS and 14,000 people are newly infected. 20 million people have died of AIDS since its first diagnosis in 1981.

- Only 7 percent of the people in developing countries who need life-prolonging "anti-retroviral" therapy (ARVs)—400,000 people—had access to it at the end of 2003.
- 14 million children have lost one or both parents to AIDS; this number is growing by 800,000 children per year.

AIDS is destroying families, casting children and adults deeper into poverty, spreading hunger and destabilizing whole countries. It is responsible for steep declines in national wealth, annual incomes, overall life expectancy, and child survival rates. Huge numbers of school teachers, health workers, farmers, skilled professionals and laborers have died of AIDS. This devastates educational and health systems, raises the prospect of widespread food shortages, and destroys the ability of both private businesses and government administrations to function properly. Astounded by the rich countries' lack of adequate response, Stephen Louis, UN special envoy for AIDS in Africa, says, "It's mass murder by complacency." ■



Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) U.S. Washington Office is a Mennonite and Brethren in Christ presence on Capital Hill which gives and encourages prophetic witness to the way of Christ on matters of public policy. For additional resources contact the MCC Washington Office at the address on the back page. Compiled by Martin Shupack, October 2004.

# Faith that reflects

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*“And at the rich man’s gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores.”*  
(Luke 16:20)

**W**hat are the limits of Christian compassion? Are some people beyond the pale of our active concern? Or do Christians reach out especially to the “least of these” by ordinary standards?

AIDS can be a troubling issue for Christians because sexual promiscuity is the main reason for its spread. Yet many AIDS sufferers were innocent or unwilling sexual partners. More than one-half of AIDS victims are women and children. In many places social expectations, economic dependency and physical threats make it almost impossible for women and girls to deny men sex. Wives cannot prevent their husbands’ promiscuity or even demand protective measures. In addition, in some countries the rape of children is increasing because infected men believe that sex with a virgin will cure AIDS. These are the horrible realities behind the spread of AIDS.

Yet, even those guilty of irresponsible or immoral conduct deserve the love of Christ, which extends to the “good and evil alike” (Matt. 5:43–48). We especially reflect the love of God in Christ when we express active compassion in the midst of the most troubling and desperate areas of human struggle. It is important, too, for Christians to know that prevention efforts in many countries emphasize chastity and marital fidelity, not simply “safe” sex.

Jesus’ story of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19–31) may have sobering parallels in the United States today. Compared to so many of

the world’s peoples, we are the rich man, finely clothed and lavishly fed (v. 19). In today’s shrinking world, AIDS sufferers, hungry and covered with sores, are close by, right at our gate (v. 20). We can easily reach them with the help they need.

In Jesus’ story both people die (v. 22). In the afterlife the very short distance that separated them in life has become a “great chasm” that no one can cross (v. 26). It is too late for the rich man in torment to receive even a drop of water from Lazarus in paradise. The rich man had the opportunity to close that gap during life, but failed to act. Now he must endure it for eternity.

This is a hard story for us in the United States, where our affluence contrasts so starkly with destitute AIDS sufferers and other desperately impoverished people throughout the world. Yet the God who calls us to transformation also provides us with the grace to respond, step by step. The goodness of God invites us to participate with confidence in God’s own work of active compassion in a divided and hurting world. ■

## Responsive Litany

**Leader:** In the midst of the long night,  
is there anyone who cares?

**All:** We say the church cares.

**Leader:** When all the relatives have died,  
is there anyone who cares?

**All:** We say the church cares.

**Leader:** When the fingers point and the  
tongues wag, is there anyone who cares?

**All:** We say the church cares.

**Leader:** In the struggle to find meaning and  
peace on the boundary of life and death,  
is there anyone who cares?

**All:** We say the church cares.

In the name of Jesus Christ,  
the church must care.

In the name of Jesus Christ,  
the church does care.

In the name of Jesus Christ,  
the church will care.

Used with permission from Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance.  
(Please acknowledge this EAA source when using this litany  
in a service.)

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- What biblical texts show God’s special concern for impoverished and suffering people?
- What biblical texts express the role of governments in alleviating human suffering?
- How does reducing global poverty increase world security?
- Who is our neighbor? Is there a trade-off between assisting people in need in the United States and helping impoverished people overseas?
- What steps can we take to “close the gap” between ourselves and impoverished AIDS sufferers?

# Faith that acts

## Action Steps: What you can do personally

- **“Let your heart be broken** by the things that break the heart of God.” Read about God’s will to heal the sick, e.g. Isa. 53:3–5; Matt. 8:16–17. Pray for help and healing for people with AIDS and their families, and for the nations of the world to fully address the AIDS pandemic. Ask God to guide you in how to participate in God’s healing work.
- **Educate** yourself and your congregation about the global AIDS epidemic (see p. 4 for resources).
- **Support** people with AIDS in your own community. Join a local activist group focusing on global health issues.

## Action Steps: What you can do through MCC

- **Contribute** to MCC’s global AIDS work. Through its “Generations at Risk” project, MCC partners with local churches across Africa, Asia and Latin America/Caribbean in support of dozens of local initiatives to address the AIDS pandemic, ranging from education initiatives to orphan care to counseling and clinics.

## Action Steps: What you can call on the U.S. government to do

- **Contact the president and members of Congress**, who have pledged to spend \$15 billion on global AIDS prevention and treatment over a 5 year period from 2004. Actual spending has not kept pace with this commitment, nor is this amount sufficient. The United States should commit \$5.4 billion annually for global AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria (\$3.5 billion for AIDS), based on the total need and the U.S. share of the world’s wealth.

- **Support the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis & Malaria**, an independent, international funding organization financed primarily by wealthy governments. The president and Congress have consistently underfunded this effort. At least \$1 billion annually of U.S. funding for global AIDS should be channeled through the Global Fund.
- **Respect the right of developing countries to use affordable generic medicines.** The U.S. Government, at the behest of the major pharmaceutical companies, works to restrict the right of developing countries to manufacture or import affordable generic versions of AIDS medications. This has kept the price of medicine beyond the reach of most AIDS sufferers.
- **Call on the United States** and other affluent nations to free resources in developing countries for overcoming AIDS and the conditions that foster AIDS, such as poverty, gender inequality, lack of education and medical care, by canceling *100 percent of international debts* of impoverished countries, *increasing foreign aid* to improve education and health care; and *engaging in fair—not exploitative—trade relations.* ■

Let me express, yet again, the fundamental conviction I have every time I visit Africa: there is no question that the pandemic can be defeated. No matter how terrible the scourge of AIDS, no matter how limited the capacity to respond, no matter how devastating the human toll, it is absolutely certain that the pandemic can be turned around with a joint and herculean effort between the African countries themselves and the international community.

—STEPHEN LEWIS, UN SPECIAL ENVOY FOR AIDS IN AFRICA.

## Pontius’ Puddle



# Resources on Global AIDS

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These organizations provide reports, analysis, statements, books and articles, which can either be downloaded from their Web sites or ordered through the mail.

## **Mennonite Central Committee**

21 South 12th Street  
P.O. Box 500  
Akron, PA 17501  
*Phone:* 717-859-1511; *Web:* [www.mcc.org](http://www.mcc.org);  
*Email:* [mailbox@mcc.org](mailto:mailbox@mcc.org)

MCC partners with local church organizations in Africa, Asia and Latin America/Caribbean in a variety of AIDS prevention and care efforts. MCC's Generations at Risk web page, [www.mcc.org/aids](http://www.mcc.org/aids), provides data on AIDS around the world, information on MCC AIDS work, resources and links to other organizations engaged in AIDS prevention and treatment in Africa, Asia and Latin America/Caribbean.

## **Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office**

110 Maryland Ave. NE  
Washington, DC 20002  
*Phone:* 202-544-6564; *Fax:* 202-544-2820;  
*Web:* [www.mcc.org/us/washington](http://www.mcc.org/us/washington);  
*Email:* [mccwash@mcc.org](mailto:mccwash@mcc.org)

The MCC U.S. Washington Office monitors and analyzes U.S. public policy on a variety of domestic and international issues, including global AIDS.

## **United Nations AIDS Program (UNAIDS)**

20, avenue Appia  
CH-1211 Geneva 27  
Switzerland  
*Phone:* 011-41-22-791-3666;  
*Fax:* 011-41-22-791-4187;  
*Web:* [www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org);  
*Email:* [unaids@unaids.org](mailto:unaids@unaids.org)

The Joint United Nations Program on AIDS "leads, strengthens and supports an expanded response aimed at preventing the transmission of HIV, providing care and support, reducing the vulnerability of individuals and communities to HIV/AIDS, and alleviating the impact of the epidemic."

## **The Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA)**

150 route de Ferney, P.O. Box 2100  
CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland  
*Phone:* 011-41-22-791-6141;  
*Fax:* 011-41-22-710-2387;  
*Web:* [www.e-alliance.ch](http://www.e-alliance.ch)

EAA "is a new and broadly ecumenical network for international cooperation in advocacy on HIV/AIDS and global trade." EAA's HIV/AIDS Campaign is called "I care . . . Do you? The Churches say YES!"

## **Washington Office on Africa (WOA)**

212 East Capitol Street  
Washington, DC 20003.  
*Phone:* 202-547-7503; *Fax:* 202-547-7505;  
*Web:* [www.woafrica.org](http://www.woafrica.org); *Email:* [woa@igc.org](mailto:woa@igc.org)

WOA is "a church-sponsored not-for-profit advocacy organization seeking to articulate and promote a just American policy toward Africa."

## **Christian Connection for International Health**

1817 Rupert St.  
McLean, VA 22101  
*Phone:* (703) 556-0123; *Web:* [www.ccih.org](http://www.ccih.org);  
*Email:* [CCIHdirector@aol.com](mailto:CCIHdirector@aol.com)

The CCIH network "promotes international health and wholeness with a Christian perspective."

## **The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria**

Geneva Secretariat  
53, Avenue Louis-Casaï  
1216 Geneva-Cointrin, Switzerland  
*Phone:* 011-41-22-791-1700;  
*Fax:* 011-41-22-791-1701;  
*Web:* [www.theglobalfund.org](http://www.theglobalfund.org);  
*Email:* [info@theglobalfund.org](mailto:info@theglobalfund.org)

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria "was created to dramatically increase resources to fight three of the world's most devastating diseases, and to direct those resources to areas of greatest need."

## **Global AIDS Alliance (GAA)**

Box 820  
Bethesda MD 20827-0820  
*Phone:* 301-765-2046; *Fax:* 301-765-6091;  
*Web:* [www.globalaidsalliance.org](http://www.globalaidsalliance.org);  
*Email:* [info@globalaidsalliance.org](mailto:info@globalaidsalliance.org)

GAA "is a transnational alliance . . . that stands for eliminating the AIDS crisis without delay by mobilizing public opinion, more money, and far better policies against HIV/AIDS and its causes, including extreme poverty."