

The Balm (HIV/AIDS) Ministry

Why did The Potter's House begin the AIDS ministry?

The work of The Potter's House Church personifies Bishop Jakes' call to minister to hurting people. One group of hurting people are those who have been devastated by the news of a HIV-positive diagnosis. The Potter's House began the Balm Ministry to assist those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. The goals of the Balm Ministry are to encourage risk prevention and risk reductions. Through the Balm Ministry, The Potter's House has been very instrumental in providing food, clothing, prayer, counseling, testing, and community agency referrals to those affected by the HIV epidemic.

The Balm Ministry is a comprehensive national and international HIV/AIDS awareness campaign that targets the faith community, women and minority populations. Goals of the ministry are to increase those who know their status, increase those who receive adequate care and treatment, and decrease number of new diagnoses.

2. When did it begin?

Although The Potter's House Church has assisted those who have self-identified as HIV-positive since the inception of The Potter's House Church, the Balm Ministry, formerly named the Samaritan Ministry, was approved as an auxiliary ministry in 1997.

3. What do they do?

The Balm Ministry functions under the auspices of The Potter's House Counseling Center. The efforts of the Balm Ministry are varied. One, the Balm Ministry communicates the latest data on HIV and AIDS along with the most recent information and research concerning the epidemic, including preventive measures and current HIV/AIDS policies. Two, the Balm Ministry coordinates free HIV testing and educational seminars for congregants and community members. Three, the Balm Ministry offers supportive individual and group counseling for HIV-positive individuals. Four, the Balm Ministry partners with community-based organizations to assist HIV-positive individuals with social service needs (e.g. food, clothing, housing, transportation); medicinal needs, and case management. Five, the Balm Ministry programs in conjunction with national initiatives such as World AIDS Day to bring attention to HIV/AIDS.

4. Why is the church important in helping prevent/address HIV/AIDS?

Historically, the church reaches the core needs of most individuals. It is the most trusted institution for many Americans. The church sits in a position of leadership and through information shared at church; many Americans formulate their belief systems and philosophies. For the church to acknowledge the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic and its detriment on society is to add credence and validation to the many national and international organizations who have attempted to give a voice to the need for attention to HIV/AIDS.

Simply, when the church speaks, people listen and when the church speaks about HIV/AIDS it gives permission to address this growing concern.

5. What can other churches do to help?

In order to effect global change in the form of a reduced number of individuals infected with HIV, an increased number of individuals tested and who know their status, and an increased number of individuals who receive appropriate access to treatment, other churches are encouraged to join forces in employing a collective effort to retard the spread of HIV. More specifically, other churches can: a) communicate the latest data on HIV and AIDS with their congregations; b) establish a HIV/AIDS ministry that purports to increase awareness and education, provide testing and intervention services, and c) partner with other like-minded entities.

6. Is HIV/AIDS still taboo in the church, If so how do we get over this?

During the first mentions of HIV, the disease was relegated to one group of individuals. Many congregants felt that the transmission of HIV was a polar opposite of their core values and beliefs, thus little attention was given to the disease or methods of prevention and reduction. There is increasingly more knowledge that there are individuals who contract HIV via means that are not the result of risky behavior. As the church learns that people from all walks of life are affected by HIV/AIDS, the widespread appeal of addressing the growing pandemic is made more apparent. Additionally, by continuing to focus on loving thy neighbor and unconditional positive regard, the church is encouraged to see HIV/AIDS, not as an unassailable plague, but as an opportunity for unification.

If not, how did we overcome this?

I believe the church is moving in the right direction. There are many causes that the church must address. The hesitancy to focus more attention on HIV/AIDS perhaps has been due to the complexity of the issue. I believe the church realizes that people perish because of the lack of knowledge and is ready to step up their efforts in addressing and retarding this growing epidemic.

7. Please tell me about your "It's Time To Step Up AIDS/HIV program?

This event launched a comprehensive national HIV/AIDS awareness campaign that targets the faith community, women and minority populations. The campaign is born out of the success of several HIV/AIDS workshops and testing events sponsored by The Potter's House that were held in 2006, including testing of more than 600 attendees of MegaFest 2006. The project focused on HIV/AIDS awareness, education, prevention, testing and optimal treatment, and served as a call to action to the faith community. The rally brought together representatives from many public sectors including community-based organizations,

politicians, faith leaders, entertainers, and those who are addressing the epidemic globally. The rally provided the latest data on AIDS in America, among youth, and globally. A local and national strategy was unveiled as The Potter's House seeks to intensify its efforts in the fight against HIV and AIDS. In addition, local community agencies were on hand to provide literature on HIV/AIDS and resource information. Finally, Bishop Jakes and Potter's House associate pastors served as role models to demonstrate the importance and user-friendly means of being tested for HIV.

It's Time to Step Up AIDS/HIV Campaign

The goal of The Potter's House Balm Ministry is to facilitate the acquisition of research, education, testing, and treatment to better address the disparities in HIV/AIDS in minority populations, who as a group, have experienced exceptionally high rates of new HIV infections and worse survival rates than other ethnic/racial groups in this country. Additionally, the Balm Ministry seeks to develop effective, culturally sensitive prevention, intervention, and treatment programs.

Objectives

- Utilize education to promote behavior change.
- Provide street/community outreach services.
- Mandate sensitivity training for all Balm volunteers.
- Address ancillary issues (e.g. SA, MH, indigence).
- Seek sponsorship and grant funding.
- Strengthen domestic/international coalitions.
- Increase cultural competence and respect of spiritual values by healthcare professionals.

Established partners will be the ONE Campaign, LaSima Foundation, Mosaic Family Services, Black AIDS Institute, Center for Disease Control, University of Texas-Southwestern, and Parkland Hospital.

Attended Center for Disease Control Heightened Response Meeting:

“More than 100 Black community leaders – from entertainers to politicians – gathered in Atlanta yesterday, March 8, to commit themselves and their organizations to specific initiatives aimed at ending the AIDS epidemic in Black America. Representatives from the faith community made some of the most heartening commitments, acknowledging ways in which the Black Church has too often contributed to stigma and pledging to turn that history around by making their institutions places where shame and silence are instead shattered. Bishop Eddie Long of the massive Atlanta-area New Birth Missionary Baptist Church and Dr. Nicole McCann of Rev. T.D. Jakes' Potter's House in Dallas, Texas, both spoke passionately

of the need to reverse what Long called the “demonization” of people living with or at risk for HIV in faith communities.” (Atlanta Voice, 8/3/07)

Attended Black AIDS Institute Strategic Planning Meeting:

“During a recent three-day National Black Leader’s AIDS Mobilization Strategic Planning Summit, the leaders said they are ready to put an end to the AIDS epidemic in Black America. Leaders representing 16 national civil rights, social, media, political, and faith-based organizations discussed strategies for decreasing HIV infection rates, increasing the percentage of Blacks who know their HIV status, increase the percentage of HIV-positive blacks in appropriate care and eliminating the stigma attached to the disease.

Nicole McCann, who serves as director of counseling services at The Potter’s House, which is presided over by **Bishop T.D. Jakes**, said the church community has come around to take on a more active role in the fight against HIV/AIDS, despite its initial slow response. The Potter’s House, McCann said, has had an HIV/AIDS program at the Dallas, Texas-based church for the past 11 years. “I think the faith-based communities, especially the black community, are stepping up its efforts against HIV/AIDS,” McCann said.” (Black AIDS Institute, 3/27/07).

(5/8-9/07) Attended ONE Campaign HIV and World Poverty Briefing

Increased resources and support including capacity building assistance for health departments, community based organizations and stakeholders serving minority communities;

(6/16/07) HIV Educator Training - 55 people certified

Established partners will the ONE Campaign, LaSima Foundation, Mosaic Family Services, Black AIDS Institute, Center for Disease Control, University of Texas-Southwestern, and Parkland Hospital.

Increased the number of minority persons at high risk for acquiring HIV that receive HIV counseling, testing and other HIV prevention, treatment and care services.

(2/7/07) Black AIDS Awareness Informational; HIV Testing -180 people

Community partners offered free HIV testing and distributed fact sheets and educational material to attendees.

(3/29-30/07) For Men Only 2007 - HIV Testing – 250

(10/15/07) National Latino HIV/AIDS Awareness Day

The Potter's House will offer free HIV testing and distribute fact sheets and educational material to attendees.

Increased national programming on HIV/AIDS.

(12/2/06) Held It's Time to Step Up Rally

"On Dec. 2, kicking off International AIDS Awareness month, Bishop T.D. Jakes, the Metroplex Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) and The Potter's House Counseling Center launched - "It's Time to Step Up!" - a comprehensive national and international HIV/AIDS awareness campaign that targets the faith community, women and minority populations. The kick-off rally at The Potter's House will feature free on-site HIV testing, and in an effort to encourage the community to test, Bishop Jakes and The Potter's House associate pastors will also publicly test for the disease. I couldn't speak to Bishop Jakes beforehand, but I did get to visit with Dr. Nicole McCann, director of counseling services at The Potter's House, which already offers counseling and other help to those afflicted by the virus. I asked her what moved Bishop Jakes to act now. "His purpose is to help unify people," she said. "What we're realizing now is that, as this epidemic grows, our efforts must grow as well." (Dallas Morning News, 11/30/06).

(4/24/07) Step Up for Youth AIDS Awareness Talent Show

Over 500 youth in attendance. Event hosted by R&B turned gospel recording artist, Lil Mo'.

(11/28 - 12/3/07) Showcase World AIDS Day "Step into Africa" exhibit.

HIV/AIDS and the Black Church

Awareness of the HIV/AIDS statistics clearly justify the need for a heightened response to the AIDS Crisis among African Americans.

STATISTICS

HIV/AIDS in 2005

1. According to the 2000 census, African Americans make up approximately 13% of the US population. However, in 2005, African Americans accounted for 18,510 (49%) of the estimated 38,096 new HIV/AIDS diagnoses in the United States in the 33 states with long-term, confidential name-based HIV reporting [2].
2. Of all African American men living with HIV/AIDS, the primary transmission category was sexual contact with other men, followed by injection drug use and high-risk heterosexual contact [2].

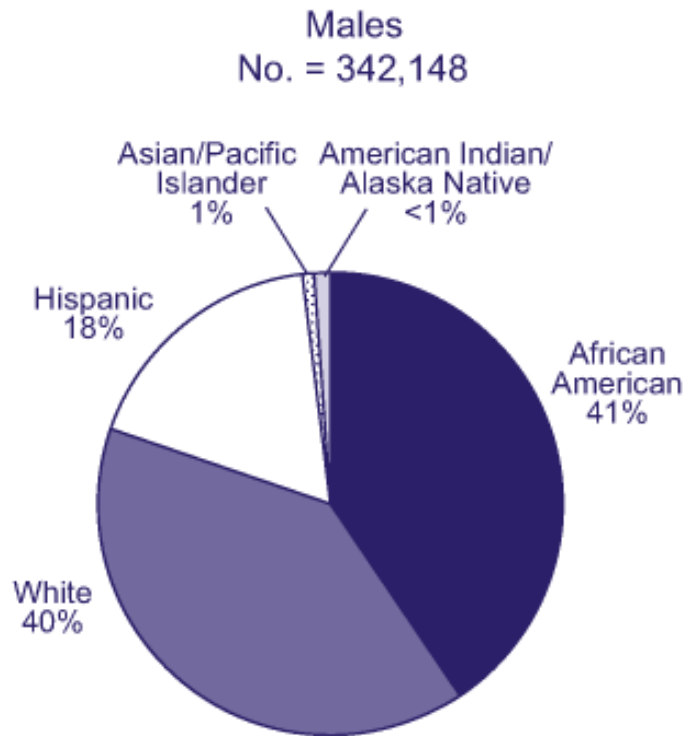
3. Of all African American women living with HIV/AIDS, the primary transmission category was high-risk heterosexual contact, followed by injection drug use [2].
4. Of the estimated 141 infants perinatally infected with HIV, 91 (65%) were African American (CDC, HIV/AIDS Reporting System, unpublished data, December 2006).
5. Of the estimated 18,849 people under the age of 25 whose diagnosis of HIV/AIDS was made during 2001–2004 in the 33 states with HIV reporting, 11,554 (61%) were African American [3].

HIV/AIDS in 2005

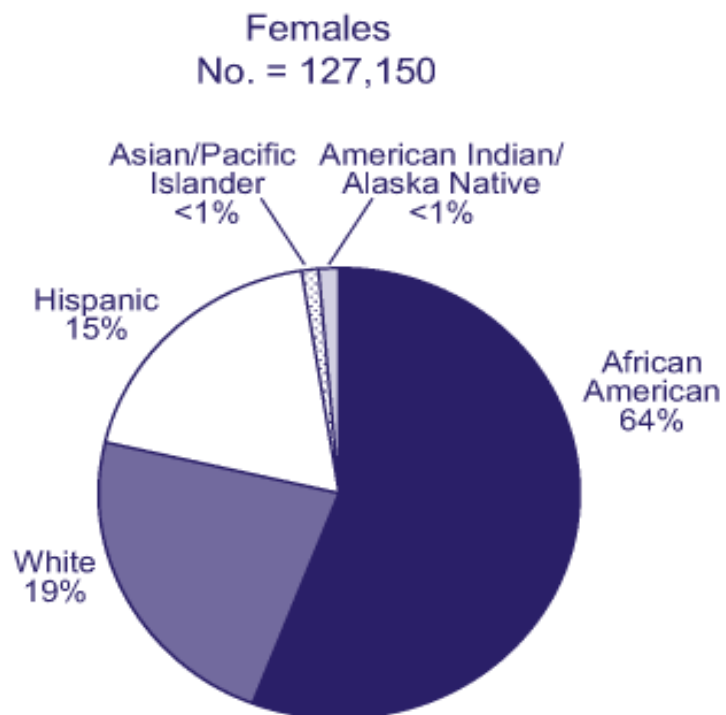
1. African Americans accounted for 22,030 (50%) of the estimated 44,198 AIDS cases diagnosed in the 50 states and the District of Columbia [2].
2. The rate of AIDS diagnoses for African American adults and adolescents was 10 times the rate for whites and nearly 3 times the rate for Hispanics. The rate of AIDS diagnoses for African American women was nearly 24 times the rate for white women. The rate of AIDS diagnoses for African American men was 8 times the rate for white men [2].
3. The 188,077 African Americans living with AIDS in the 50 states and the District of Columbia accounted for 44% of the 425,910 people in the United States living with AIDS [2].
4. Of the 58 US children (younger than 13 years of age) who had a new AIDS diagnosis, 39 were African American [2].

There is no question that the time to act is NOW.

Race/ethnicity of adults and adolescents living with HIV/AIDS,



2005



Note. Based on data from 33 states with long-term, confidential name-based HIV reporting.

AIDS Conspiracy Beliefs

HIV/AIDS' initial relegation as a "white, gay man's disease" and the sluggish response of the Black church has much to do with the skepticism and inconsequential reaction of African Americans.

For example, Figure 1 highlights the responses to an Oregon State University study on AIDS Conspiracy Beliefs (as featured in the Washington Post).

Figure 1

AIDS Conspiracy Beliefs

A recent study shows a portion of African Americans believe that AIDS is a government-led conspiracy to kill them, which creates barriers to treatment and prevention efforts.

Blacks who believe in some HIV/AIDS conspiracy

Percent who agree somewhat or strongly HIV is a man-made virus

48.2%

There is a cure for AIDS, but it is being withheld from the poor

53.4%

HIV was created and spread by the CIA

12%

AIDS is a form of genocide against blacks

15.2%

Medical and public health institutions are trying to stop the spread of HIV in black communities

75.4%

AIDS was produced in a government laboratory

26.6%

*The telephone survey was conducted between September 2002 and March 2003 and based on 500 completed surveys out of a random digital dialing of 19,000 telephone numbers. Questions were asked of respondents who were black or African American, ages 15 to 44 and born in the U.S. The numbers were from areas in the U.S. with estimated black household densities of at least 27% based on U.S. census data. The survey was conducted by Applied Research Northwest of Bellingham, Wash.

SOURCES: The Rand Corp., Oregon State University

THE WASHINGTON POST

The Black Church

The Black Church which was the first source of land ownership for slaves in America is viewed as the reason and savior of oppressed African people in the United States. For slaves, religion offered a means of catharsis... Africans retained their faith in God and found refuge in their churches. Historically and currently, for many African-American Christians, regardless of their denominational differences, Black Churches have always represented their religion,

community, and home. Scholars have repeatedly asserted that Black history and Black church history overlap enough to be virtually identical. Almost a century ago the Black church was an organizational site for social and political activities, centers for economic development and growth. As microcosms of the larger society, Black churches perceivably provide an environment free of oppression and racism for African-Americans. Due in part to the overlap of church and community, the representational structure of African-American churches confirms Black preachers as both religious and community leaders (voluntarily or involuntarily).

The Influence of the Black Church

A recent study cites the following:

- 53% of African Americans attend church on a given Sunday, which is similar to the rate of church attendance among whites (43%) (2002).
- 21% of the African American population is unchurched, compared to 32% of whites (1998).
- Compared to 66% of whites, 83% of blacks say their religious faith is very important in their lives (2001).
- 46% feel that they have a responsibility to tell other people about their religious beliefs; 33% of whites feel the same way (2001).
- 45% of black adults are born again Christians (2001).
- African-American adults are less likely than Hispanics or whites to contend that moral truth is absolute. In total, 10% of African-Americans believe moral truth is absolute, compared to 15% of Hispanics and 26% of whites (2001).
- 56% of blacks interviewed are absolutely committed to Christianity (2002).
- The typical black church has an average attendance that is about 50% greater than that of the typical white church (1997).
- 63% say the pastors of black churches are the most important leaders in the African-American community (1996).

There is no question that effectual change begins with the Black church.

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