



THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The Most Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori
Presiding Bishop and Primate

December 1, 2007

For the Congregations of the Episcopal Church

I give thanks as you gather to reflect on the impact that HIV/AIDS has had on the families, congregations, and communities in and beyond the Episcopal Church. I pray that our efforts to prevent and develop effective treatment for this disease will be strengthened, once again, by calling to mind those who have died as a result of this disease. I also pray that new generations will be inspired by the many who have answered the prophet Isaiah's call to bring "the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a mantle of praise instead of a faint heart."

As we enter the second quarter-century of this disease, I am mindful of how far we have come and how far we have yet to go. I continue to be inspired by the ingenuity of the human spirit as people around the world work to develop effective prevention programs and new treatments for HIV and AIDS. Since 1988, the National Episcopal AIDS Coalition has served as a witness to these gains. Through their ongoing work, our church is better equipped to bring God's healing embrace to many who suffer from this disease.

These gains, however, do not negate the fact that HIV/AIDS continues to spread in distressing ways both within the United States and abroad. The statistics tell what has become an all too familiar story—namely, that HIV/AIDS devastates society's most marginalized communities. Among people who are HIV positive, the groups showing the fastest and highest increases within the United States are youth, women, and people of color. We must attend to, and work to change, the ways in which social stigmatization, particularly racism and gender discrimination, serve to exacerbate the spread of this disease.

All of us are called to follow in Jesus' footsteps in bringing God's hope and healing to those who live with this disease. I am particularly grateful for the National Episcopal AIDS Coalition's work in challenging the stigma that still haunts this disease. NEAC's work, along with that of so many others, makes manifest the gift of God's persistent love. It is as bearers of this love that we are called bring "the oil of gladness instead of mourning."

Know that you are in my prayers. I remain

Your servant in Christ,

Katharine Jefferts Schori