

more tragic, most of them have been ostracized, neglected and ignored by the church. The time has come to say no to our fears and yes to embracing the dying.

The response for us becomes a choice of whether we will sit back with our arms folded and say, "I told you so. You made your bed. Sleep in it." Or whether we will minister to these amongst us on the condition that they are willing to "fess up" to the sin or how it was acquired. Or whether we will roll up our sleeves and minister to them because we want to demonstrate how Jesus cares for them and wants to enter into a relationship with them.

### ASKING DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

The reality is that at times people with HIV or AIDS or people terminally ill for other reasons are asking deep and searching questions.

What is the meaning of life?

Who will look after me when I am too sick to look after myself? Many people who are HIV positive have lived lifestyles of the prodigal son and have no one to look after them when they are sick. Their families have rejected them and are too embarrassed to be identified with their wayward daughter or son.

Will I be able to bear the physical pain? Often the emotional pain hurts even more than the physical.

Will I be too ugly/helpless/poor to be loved by anyone?

Is there a God? How can I know?

What will happen to me when I die?

As believers we have answers to these questions, in the Bible, in our hands, and in our hearts.

The Pharisees were looking for a Messiah who would associate with respectable people. "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" they asked. Jesus' response was, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:16,17).

To show compassion for the spiritually sick is not to condone their sin. We are called upon as Christians to love others in spite of their sin, whether that sin is sexual in nature or not. "Jesus understood the terrible consequences of sexual sin, but refused to write these people off as unworthy of his compassion."

### HOW SHOULD I RESPOND?

Ask Jesus to give you care and compassion for PHA's.

Ask Jesus not to let the stigma of this disease and how it is acquired control your response or involvement.

If you are a pastor, preach on the topic, in a way that will invite someone in your congregation to come out with their struggle so they will not have to suffer alone. Preach in a way that prepares your congregation to minister to this person. Contact an Exodus Ministry and/or bring someone in to talk about their struggle with AIDS so that you can put a face to the struggle.<sup>1</sup>

Get involved in a local AIDS volunteer organization so that you can begin to get to know actual sufferers and their needs. Many of them need someone to get them groceries or do laundry on a day when they are feeling too weak, etc.

If you are a youth leader, educate your youth on HIV. Bring someone in to talk about AIDS who believes in complete abstinence from sex outside of marriage. (see *True Love Waits* curriculum).<sup>2</sup>

Develop an HIV AIDS policy for your church.<sup>3</sup> Pray that God will use this disease to glorify himself through his church. And pray that ministries to AIDS victims will arise out of the church body and that the loving ministry of Christians will testify to the faithfulness and mercy of God and draw many to him.

### Endnotes

1. Exodus International, PO Box 21039, Ajax, ON L1H 7H2. Tel. (905) 686-7363 • Fax. (905) 686-1716 • E-mail: ae860@freenet.durham.org
2. "True Love Waits" curriculum available from Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, M.I.P. Box 3745, Markham, Ontario, L3R 0Y4.
3. "Developing Your Church AIDS Policy" booklet. Available through AIDS Information Ministries, 6032 LakeWorth Blvd., Fort Worth, Texas, 76135. Ph (817) 237-3146 Fax (817) 238-2048

© October 1998. Written by Nancy Gamey, who with her husband Tye gives leadership to New Directions for Life, a Winnipeg ministry to people who want to abandon the homosexual lifestyle. They are members of The Meeting Place, a Mennonite Brethren congregation in Winnipeg.

Published by the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Board of Faith and Life. For additional copies or information, contact: Canadian MB Conference, 3-169 Riverton Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R2L 2E5.

# When Someone Has AIDS

## A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

MENNONITE BRETHREN

Faith  
& Life

PAMPHLET SERIES

---

## WHEN SOMEONE HAS

# AIDS

## Finding a Christian Response

BY NANCY GAMEY

---

The phone rings in a Christian counselling office. "Hello. I heard your story on TV the other night. It's so good to know that I am not alone in this struggle with homosexuality. I thought I was the only one. I attend a Mennonite Brethren church, I am HIV positive, and I've never told anyone."

Another story. Dennis has AIDS. His mother came to stay with him in his Winnipeg home during his last weeks of life. Five of the people who spent time with him during these weeks were followers of Christ. It was exhausting. Dennis lost his mind. In the end he was little more than a skeleton with skin draped over it. But he committed his life to Jesus because of the love shown to him and because he didn't want to face death alone. Dennis wanted his life to count for something. He didn't get to use his financial expertise for the Lord, but within the gay community his AIDS brought credibility to a small group of Christians for the way they served, loved and ministered to Dennis.

### HOW IS HIV ACQUIRED?

We now know with certainty how HIV and AIDS are acquired. Four documented routes of transmission are intimate sexual contact, sharing contaminated needles, infected mothers passing the virus to the unborn fetus, and infusions of infected blood. More specifically, "those fluids that provide sufficient virus for transmission seem to be limited to blood, semen, and vaginal secretions" (The Journal of the American Medical Association, May 13, 1987). The virus itself is weak and cannot survive outside the human blood stream. Often it takes years—sometimes many years—for the HIV to lead to

AIDS.

Persons with HIV and/or AIDS are now referring to themselves as PHA's. This term has replaced the former abbreviation of PWA which stood for Person With AIDS. The new term is more inclusive, because it includes those who are HIV positive and have not yet manifested symptoms of fully-developed AIDS.

### IS THERE A CURE?

It is outside of the scope of this brochure to deal with the various treatments for HIV. At this time there still is no known complete cure for HIV, even though there are now drug combinations which have been found to bring the virus below detectable levels in the blood stream. The drawback of such treatment is the side effects and their cost (ballpark of \$20,000 annually per patient). It is too early to know if these drugs can eliminate the virus completely and infected persons take a big risk if they continue to expose themselves to the virus. Other approaches are also being worked that offer considerable promise.

### IS AIDS THE JUDGMENT OF GOD?

This question often arises in Christian circles, and not just in regards to HIV. When any calamity or hardship hits, we often ask the question, "What have I done wrong?" The Bible refers to three different forms of judgment.

The first and most basic form of judgment talked about in the Bible is universal. According to the Bible, if all of us were to receive what we deserve, we should be dead. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)" and "the wages of sin is death. . . (Romans 6:23a)."

The second kind of judgment talked about is a cause and effect judgment. This kind of judgment often occurs in the physical realm. When a person jumps or falls off a tall building, they'll likely be injured or even killed. Something similar happens in the spiritual and moral realms. The Bible has prohibitions against theft, drunkenness, rape, homosexual practice, adultery, etc. God has given us rules because he wants us to enjoy life, and because we need the safety of boundaries. If we violate God's moral and spiritual laws on adultery, the result will be harm to a marriage; the results of self-centred parenting will show up in alienated children; and the lack

of boundaries on sexuality shows up in millions of abortions, the woundedness from sexual abuse and masses of people with sexually transmitted diseases. This is cause and effect judgment living itself out.

The third kind of judgment in the Scriptures is God's judgment in history. "God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness." (Rom. 1:18). Because of human rebellion God visits this world or parts of this world from time to time with famines, wars, earthquakes, epidemics and other plagues. Believers are not objects of divine wrath, but they live in a sinful world, and when God visits the land with disasters, they suffer just as unbelievers do. Such judgments of God in human history are God's call to repentance. The flood in Noah's time, the destruction of Sodom and Gommorah, and the drought in Israel in Elijah's time were such judgments.

Of the three types of judgment, it is difficult to see AIDS as a judgment of God in history. AIDS is not directed only at homosexuals nor is it directed at all homosexuals. It can be contracted by innocent victims, and the lesbian population almost never contracts it. It seems more appropriate to describe AIDS as a cause and effect judgment.

Nevertheless, there is little question that sin is often (though definitely not always) involved in the acquisition of AIDS. Does this then give the church

**People infected by AIDS have been ostracized, neglected and ignored by the church. The time has come to say no to our fears and yes to embracing the dying.**

reason to take satisfaction or to rejoice when we see people suffering from AIDS because God's spiritual and moral laws on sexuality and respect for the body are being vindicated? No, certainly not.

Sadly, there have been many people infected by HIV who come from a church background. Even