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“The Black Church is the only institution that has loved our people from the cradle to the grave. We loved them through slavery, through poverty, and through racism. We cannot make HIV the exception to our love. As the Mother Institution, we must love our people through the valley of HIV.”

— Bishop John Bryant, African Methodist Episcopal Church, Chicago, Illinois
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For more than 30 years, the fight against HIV has been an uphill battle, particularly within the African-American community. Strides have been made. But significant work remains to ensure our community is educated and prepared to prevent the spread of HIV, which continues to ravage far too many of our people.

Despite diligent prevention efforts, African Americans make up almost half of all new HIV infections in the United States each year, resulting in thousands of lives lost, shattered dreams, and families torn apart. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is committed to taking action against this disease, arming our community with the information and resources necessary to face this challenge, and preventing this epidemic from taking the lives of any more of our present or future leaders.

Since 1909, the NAACP has partnered with the Black Church to fight for equality and justice. We are confident the Black Church will continue to play its preeminent leadership role on the critical issues affecting our people, including the HIV epidemic. The value and role of the Black Church is undeniable. Like our community as a whole, the NAACP invites the Black Church to be what it has always been and always will be: both a beacon of hope and a powerful, prophetic, and progressive force for good on the issues we face together. We hope to strengthen and deepen our partnership with the Black Church as we fight the battle against HIV.

As an ordained Baptist minister, I can say with full confidence that answering God’s call in the midst of life’s many challenges is not only a responsibility—it is also a privilege. Some in our community mistakenly argue the HIV issue has no place in the Church. I respectfully disagree. Addressing these kinds of issues is just what Jesus calls us to do—did He not minister to the sick with love and mercy? We cannot turn our backs on some of our flock’s most vulnerable members.

The HIV epidemic is assuredly one of the pressing issues facing African Americans today. It is the duty of every African-American faith leader to bring the healing ministry of Jesus to all members of our beloved community. We encourage those who minister to engage with the NAACP’s Health Department, which unites faith leaders in a shared mission to fight the HIV epidemic in the African-American community with bravery and resolution.

It is only by God’s grace that we will end this insidious yet preventable epidemic. Thanks to His grace, courage is also contagious—and must not skip this generation.

Peace and Power!
Shadowed Beneath His Almighty Hand,

ROSLYN M. BROCK
Chairman, NAACP National Board of Directors
In the same way that our Lord once touched and restored to life the daughter of Jairus, the NAACP has partnered with the Black Church to represent a healing touch for African Americans—including those who are at risk of contracting or are living with HIV.

The health and well-being of African Americans continue to be under attack, and the HIV epidemic plaguing our communities is preventing us from reaching our healthiest potential in American society. We must amplify our efforts to combat HIV among our people and pave the way for a healthier future for all.

This year, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that 44 percent of all new HIV diagnoses occurred among African-American men, women, and children, despite the fact that Black Americans comprise just 13 percent of the total population. This is a hard fact to swallow, let alone digest. Standing by and doing nothing to help our brothers and sisters is simply unacceptable. We can no longer ignore the HIV epidemic within our community. We must defeat it.

The battle against HIV and AIDS is one that the NAACP is committed to winning, but we cannot do it alone. We know the power of the pulpit in our community—which is why we have partnered with the Black Church to address HIV as a social justice issue. In this struggle, we need faith leaders as commanders and the faithful as foot soldiers. Indeed, we hope all African Americans will join us in this righteous fight.

For the past century, the NAACP and the Black Church have been working together to advance justice and equality for African Americans by fighting to demand civil and voting rights, improving economic and educational opportunities, pushing our governments, police, and prosecutors to enact criminal justice reform, and standing for environmental and climate justice for our people. The Black Church and the NAACP have a historic opportunity to continue this fruitful partnership and smite the foe that is the HIV epidemic.

Our weapons will be education, testing, and access to health care while we act with faith and compassion. As part of the Black Church and HIV initiative, we are pleased to offer you this briefing material providing the framework, information, and resources needed to get involved. With your contributions, advocacy, and work, we can continue to be powerful allies in combating HIV through the lens of social justice.

HIV is a preventable disease, and we must use every resource at our disposal to prevent its spread. The NAACP welcomes our continued partnership with the Black Church to battle this injustice so that trends will be reversed, lives will be changed, and justice will be realized.

In the fight,

CORNELL WILLIAM BROOKS
President and CEO, NAACP
The African-American community is on the front lines of the fight against HIV. More than any other racial or ethnic group, African Americans bear the greatest burden of the HIV epidemic in the U.S. The disease has ravaged individuals, families, and communities. And the stigma of HIV has led to misunderstanding, discrimination, and shame among those diagnosed, often preventing them from seeking the life-saving and -changing treatments they need.

The challenges we face are significant, pernicious, and persistent. The numbers are simply staggering—and to some seem insurmountable. In 2014, the rate of new HIV infections among African Americans was eight times higher than among whites. Comparing figures from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2015) and the World Health Organization (WHO, 2016), we find that—if the African-American community were its own country—it would rank 11th in the world for new HIV infections.

We must always remember that these statistics are just that—numbers. HIV, however, is about people. Our people. Our community. Our future. Our love.

For centuries, the Black Church and faith leaders have played a prominent role in advocating for civil rights and social justice for the African-American community. Despite generations of slavery, subjugation, and segregation, we have always had a fierce faith in God, one that has carried us through the hardest of times. St. Peter was the rock upon which Jesus said to build his Church. Centuries later, the Black Church became the rock upon which the African-American community built its salvation, freedom, and equality.

In the 20th Century, our community also built the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Born out of the Niagara Movement that was started by W.E.B. DuBois and William Monroe Trotter—and with deep connections to the Black Church—the NAACP always has and continues to focus on uplifting the spirit and lives of African Americans,
often in partnership with African-American faith leaders and religious institutions.

This spirit and history of social justice advocacy makes the Black Church and NAACP natural leaders in the battle against HIV in our community. We are joined by Gilead Sciences, a research-based biopharmaceutical company with a demonstrated commitment to science, research, and innovation in the fight against HIV. Together, the NAACP and Gilead Sciences are committed to equipping African-American faith leaders with the tools and resources needed to affect positive change regarding HIV.

But we also need your help. In this effort, *The Black Church & HIV: The Social Justice Imperative* initiative works to form a national network of faith leaders, religious institutions, and community members committed to making change and ending the HIV epidemic in the African-American community. Faith leaders like you are the cornerstone of this important work.

You hold the key to reaching hundreds of thousands of community members with life-saving information and resources, reducing the stigma of HIV, and helping our people live healthy lives.

We invite you to join us in this fight, to be a catalyst for change in your congregation and community. Now is the time to use your voice to face this social justice issue head on.
A SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUE

HIV/AIDS: THE BASICS

The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) attacks the immune system, which protects the body from infections. If left untreated, HIV can lead to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), where the body can’t defend itself and is much more likely to develop infections and diseases. People living with HIV may appear and feel healthy for several years, but HIV still affects their immune system.

The first case of HIV in the United States was diagnosed in 1981. Since, hundreds of thousands of people have died from the disease, decimating many communities. Thankfully, due to advances in treatment, HIV is no longer a death sentence. It is now considered a chronic, manageable illness with proper care and treatment. More than 1.2 million people live with HIV in the United States (CDC 2016a). People living with HIV now can live long and productive lives—with the right treatments, delivered early and consistently. That makes it all the more important for people to get tested and know their status.

While medical treatments have made living with HIV more manageable, African Americans continue to be disproportionately impacted by the disease. Although we represent just 13% of the U.S. population, African Americans account for 44% of all new diagnoses (CDC, 2016a; CDC, 2016b) and are nearly eight times more likely to contract HIV than whites—and more than twice as likely to be infected as Latinos/Latinas (CDC 2015).

AFRICAN AMERICANS ACCOUNT FOR 44% OF ALL NEW DIAGNOSES.

IN 2014, AMONG ALL WOMEN DIAGNOSED WITH HIV, 62% WERE AFRICAN AMERICAN.
In addition, according to the CDC, African Americans most affected by HIV include men who have sex with men (MSM); women and girls; and youths (ages 13 to 24). Based on CDC Surveillance Reports on HIV by group:

- More than half (57%) of HIV diagnoses in African Americans were among gay and bisexual men in 2014.
  - Of those gay and bisexual men, more than a third were young men aged 13 to 24.
  - More than a third (38%) of gay and bisexual men diagnosed with HIV in the United States in 2014 were African American.

- In 2014, African-American women represented more than one-fourth (26%) of HIV diagnoses among African Americans.
  - In 2014, among all women diagnosed with HIV, 62% were African American.
  - The rate of new infections among African-American women is more than three times higher than it is among white women and Latinas (CDC, 2015).

- Youth aged 13 to 24 in the U.S. accounted for roughly 22% of all new HIV diagnoses in 2014.
  - Most diagnoses occurred among young gay and bisexual males, with young African-American and Latino gay and bisexual males experiencing the highest impacts.

Geography also increases risk of HIV for African Americans. While HIV is prevalent across the United States, the South represents the majority of HIV diagnoses within our community. Just 10 states accounted for the majority (68%) of African Americans living with an HIV diagnosis at the end of 2010, with New York and Florida topping the list (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2014).

The high rates of HIV infection among African Americans in the United States clearly demonstrate that racism in the political, health care, economic, and educational systems plays a significant role in creating these profound social injustices. This threat to the survival and well-being of our community is nothing short of a human rights issue. It is our responsibility to speak out and fight the systems that make and keep us vulnerable to HIV infection.

**IN THE WORDS OF FAITH LEADERS**

“We asked this question during one of our worship services: ‘Do you know anyone personally who is HIV-positive or who has died from AIDS?’ People responded YES or NO to the poll anonymously via their cell phones. Results from largest service: YES: 93%, NO: 7%. The immediacy and impact of the results gave gravity to the subject matter. HIV was no longer a discussion about ‘them’ outside of the sanctuary; it was about ‘us’ sitting in this sanctuary.”

- Rev. John R. Faison Sr.

**WHAT IS SOCIAL JUSTICE?**

The term “social justice” refers to a sustained commitment to create a society based on equality and fairness for all, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, creed, sexual orientation, educational level, political beliefs, economic situation, or national origin. To reach this goal, the social justice movement fights all forms of oppression, discrimination, and disenfranchisement by advocating for systemic societal changes to empower all peoples. While in the modern context social justice is often framed in economic, educational, and
political terms, we must remain cognizant that social justice also has a historic and biblical foundation that compels the faithful to work for the equitable treatment of all people.

Social justice means:
- Serving the whole person through mercy, love, and grace.
- Breaking down divisions, healing wounds, and honoring the interconnectedness of all by practicing conscious, motivated justice.
- Treating all human beings as worthy of dignity, care, and respect.
- Having a healthy relationship with yourself, your fellow human beings, and with God.

SOCIAL IMPACT OF HIV

African Americans are the most highly impacted race when it comes to HIV infection in the United States. We are:

- More likely to become infected.
- Less likely to get treatment.
- Less likely to know we have the disease.
- More likely to die from AIDS (Brock, R. & Jealous, B.T., 2001).

The disparities represented by these statements are driven by social and economic inequities and barriers to human flourishing. These include limited access to quality health care, lower incomes and education levels, and higher rates of unemployment and incarceration. A disproportionate number of African Americans living with HIV are poor, and often also struggle with substance use, mental health problems, hunger, and unstable housing. These conditions often mean earlier death, decreased quality of life, loss of economic opportunity, and social inequity, as well as limited knowledge of and participation in outreach and prevention efforts (such as access to new and better intervention treatments like pre-exposure prophylaxis or “PrEP”).

It is time that we collectively demand a change, elevate the conversation about social injustice and health, and seek to save the next generation of African Americans from HIV.

RESPONDING TO HIV IN OUR COMMUNITY

Throughout our history, our churches have served as places of hope and healing. In times of mistreatment and exploitation, the Black Church advocated for social justice and fought tirelessly to ensure a more equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and responsibilities throughout society. This advocacy has driven multiple social movements, including those to end slavery, expand educational opportunities, fight for employment rights, and increase voter registration.

African-American clergy often served as the voice of these movements, articulating our community’s grievances and igniting powerful action. Thanks in part to these faith-led movements, we have increased the social, health, educational, financial, and professional

IN THE WORDS OF FAITH LEADERS

“Recent events sparking national and international outrage have prompted the Black Church to once again recall its social witness. Though in the last three decades, we have seen political leadership and cultural icons dwarf the Church’s public advocacy, there is presently a resurgence among younger clergy committed to public theology and social action. Among the items of redress is the HIV epidemic.”

- Rev. C. Edward Rhodes II
opportunities available to African Americans. Yet, there is still much more work to be done.

African Americans suffer inequality on a number of health issues, including heart disease, diabetes, and HIV. But while the African-American community has rallied to combat heart disease and diabetes, HIV continues to be a silent killer among our people. It is time for this silence to end. The HIV epidemic calls for a collective response from our community—including and especially faith leaders. As it has done for centuries, the Black Church must lead the fight for social justice, regardless of stigma or discomfort within a congregation or among ministerial staff and colleagues.

Addressing the broad spectrum of social inequities and injustices our community faces is the only way to end the HIV epidemic. Social interventions—many already offered by churches—that focus on education, employment and job security, health services, housing, income, and social inclusion can address the root causes of HIV vulnerability. Improving the number and frequency of these social interventions can help improve the lives of those living with HIV and prevent its spread.

Through the resources outlined in this Pastoral Brief and detailed further in the accompanying Activity Manual, we seek to equip you with the tools you need to effectively engage your flock and successfully fight and defeat HIV as a social justice issue impacting the African-American community.
The challenge we face from HIV is difficult, but not insurmountable—if we work together to save our community. We must also actively engage with the health care community so we can harness the skills and resources needed to take this fight to the enemy. With this in mind, in 2010 the NAACP began working with Gilead Sciences to create The Black Church & HIV: The Social Justice Imperative. This Initiative seeks to reverse the impact of HIV on African Americans by providing faith leaders with the knowledge and support necessary to address this disease as a social justice issue within and through churches.

Numerous faith leaders like you have embraced the challenge to fight HIV from the pulpit, using your voice to call the faithful to action and harness the loving power of the Almighty.

Through the Initiative, we are establishing a national network of African-American faith leaders, religious institutions, and community members committed to fostering systemic cultural and behavioral change to help those hit hardest by HIV. Together, we must transform HIV from a polarizing and stigmatizing issue into a social justice priority for our community.

There are three primary components and opportunities for your involvement in this Initiative, which have served as the foundation of our Initiative since it began:

- **Faith Leader Trainings.**
- **Senior Denominational Engagement.**
- **Seminary Integration.**

Hundreds of faith leaders and communities have joined us in elevating the discussion about HIV. And many churches have participated in our most important annual event, the Day of Unity, where African-American faith leaders and their churches come together to fight HIV through preaching and good works.
As more faith leaders engage their congregations on HIV, more parishioners will realize the importance of actively responding to the epidemic in our community. This, in turn, will help turn the tide of stigma associated with the disease, encouraging more African Americans to get tested, know their HIV status, access care, and support fellow community members to do so as well.

**We cannot win this fight alone. We need faith leaders like you to make a commitment to facing HIV for what it is—both a public health crisis and a social justice issue—and helping to end the epidemic in our community.**

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**CLINTON GLOBAL INITIATIVE (CGI) COMMITMENT TO ACTION IN 2013**

As a result of the overwhelmingly positive response to our pilot program, the NAACP and Gilead Sciences also made a joint CGI Commitment to Action in 2013 to expand our reach over five years (2013 – 2018) by engaging faith leaders in the 30 cities that make up nearly two-thirds of the nation’s HIV cases. With the CGI Commitment, our pledge to end the HIV epidemic in the African-American community has only gotten stronger.
As a faith leader, we invite you to join the Initiative and our national movement of the faithful. You have already taken an important first step by reading this Pastoral Brief.

We hope you will soon take the next step: read the accompanying Activity Manual, which provides strategic direction and specific steps on how you can partner with the NAACP and Gilead Sciences to implement this important Initiative.

We ask you to do four simple things as part of this social justice movement:

- Attend an Initiative faith leader training.
- Pray and preach about HIV as a social justice issue.
- Participate in the Day of Unity.
- Integrate HIV-education activities into your existing church programs and health ministries.

You are a catalyst for change, a convener of conversation. You see a community need and your calling drives you to make a difference. Put your faith into action to harness the healing power of God’s love to stop oppression, injustice, and this dangerous epidemic.

As leaders in the Body of Christ, it is your sacred duty to deliver a message of hope, salvation, and healing to your flock. You have fought for economic, educational, and social justice. Now it is time to fight just as hard for health equity as it relates to HIV.

Your voice is a powerful one, your leadership a beacon of faith, courage, and hope for many. As a faith leader, you must use the gifts God has given you to fight for our community’s very survival.

**IN THE WORDS OF FAITH LEADERS**

Reverend Dr. Timothy Sloan, the Senior Pastor at St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church in Humble, Texas, preached a sermon that included messages on HIV. Before he got up
to speak, Rev. Sloan had many thoughts in his mind that day: “How will this message be received? Are people going to walk out on me during the sermon? Is this message going to touch someone? Am I doing the right thing?”

Rev. Sloan soon discovered that his message touched so many, he received a standing ovation. He was encouraged by the positive reception and knew that by using the power of the pulpit he could reach his flock and encourage them to face the HIV epidemic in our community head-on. He stood on his faith and on the Word of God:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.”

Jesus gave voice to the marginalized, love to the outcast, and power to the oppressed. He was in all ways a healer while He walked this Earth. The Black Church has historically been a place of healing as well—spiritually, physically, and emotionally. Churches have served as places to plan revolutions, experience revival, celebrate our cultural identity, and ponder our divine destiny.

While we represent a diverse array of Christian denominations and doctrines, the Black Church as a whole is the only institution birthed during slavery that spans the length and breadth of our community today, continues to be led from within, and is dedicated to the just treatment of our race. With a strong foundation in liberation theology, Black Churches have used sermons, ministry programs, and community action to address inequities across various systems. Today, faith leaders can apply the characteristics of Jesus’ ministry to HIV:

1. **Heal the Sick**: When praying for the sick in your services, also pray for the healing of those infected and affected by HIV. Be sure to treat HIV as you would any other illness and those who are HIV-positive the same as you would someone with conditions less impacted by social stigma.

2. **Serve as an Advocate for the Oppressed and Underserved**: Our communities are disproportionately impacted by HIV and many have inadequate access to quality health care, including testing opportunities and treatment. You can serve as an advocate—from the pulpit to the state house to Congress to the White House.

3. **Build Communities with Faith and Love**: As a faith leader, you can empower your congregation and community to embrace those who are HIV-positive and those impacted by HIV. We call on you to foster the needs of those with HIV in your church ministry and promote an environment of acceptance, understanding, and compassion for all.

If you, as a faith leader, use the power of your voice to speak out about the root causes of HIV...
disparities in the African-American community and unite your flock for collective action, we can put an end to the HIV epidemic in our lifetime. We have an opportunity for revival. And nothing can stop us if we work together.

The divine destiny of the Church is to drive positive change by holistically ministering to the needs of all parishioners. We must both help them live life today and prepare them to receive eternal salvation. This has, does, and will continue to require spiritual action—a revival of faith and the spirit for the betterment of our people and the glory of the Kingdom.

If there is a revival that is needed, let us all say and mean “let the revival begin in me.” This Initiative to address HIV in the African-American community is our cause and calling.

A MODERN-DAY PARABLE: ONE MAN’S JOURNEY WITH HIV, FAITH, AND THE CHURCH

A man who loved and worshipped God with all his heart was offered a wonderful opportunity that would benefit him professionally. Preparing for this opportunity meant undergoing a full medical examination, including an HIV test, which he strongly believed would be negative. When his examination went as planned, he had no reservations about waiting and returning for his test results. When the gentleman returned to his doctor’s office a short time later, the nurse called him back to share his test results. She told him that the test was positive and gave him some brochures. The young man thanked her and left the office thinking, “Great! I passed!”

And then it hit him. Positive? For HIV? He re-read the papers he received from the clinic. He was HIV-positive. Confused and in shock, he returned to the clinic and asked the nurse to explain everything to him once again. This was just not possible! He had only been sexually involved with two people that year. How could this be?

Devastated, confused, angry, and grief-stricken, the young man decided to go to the one place where he knew he would be comforted: his church. As he entered the house of worship, one of the church mothers greeted him cheerily and asked him how he was doing. The pain in his heart was too much to bear and he broke down in tears, sobbing inconsolably on the ground. It took several minutes of coaxing from the church mother, head pastor, and associate pastor before he told them about his HIV diagnosis.

Seeking to comfort him, the associate pastor physically moved away from him to pray. He left that church feeling even more desolate and spent the next month and a half agonizing about how he was going to deal with his HIV diagnosis.

He decided to attend support group meetings in the community. There, he felt welcomed, and the friends he made helped him face his new life with hope. To his joy, he found a place of worship whose church community and leadership was welcoming to him—a man living openly with HIV. This faith community responded to his HIV status with the healing power of the Good News as preached by Jesus Christ.
The story on the previous page is not unique. These kinds of situations occur frequently in Black Churches all over the country. As you reflect on this man’s experience—as a faith leader, child of God, and disciple of Christ—always remember Our Lord’s approach to the sick, weak, poor, and outcast.

Consider the following:

1. **One of the health disparities African Americans face is a limited understanding of health terms.** Oftentimes, we don’t go to the doctor’s office for annual examinations. If we do, we don’t always ask our doctors the questions we should because of fear, pride, or a lack of understanding. When it comes to HIV, the Black Church can help empower our community to take control of its health by providing information and resources. Just as we have done with heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and breast cancer, we should continue to help educate our community about HIV and testing information.

2. **HIV does not discriminate.** HIV can be passed from any person to another, regardless of race, sex, age, marital status, class, religion, or sexual orientation.

3. **A church that affirms the Gospel is one that accepts anyone and everyone.** Social justice was at the core of Jesus’ ministry, and this should serve as the primary example of how all other ministries should be implemented. Just as Christ turned no one away, our church doors should be open to all, especially to people struggling with despair, sadness, sickness, and need. As we make efforts to address the HIV epidemic, the Black Church should not be a place where people experience HIV stigma and discrimination, but rather a place of healing, support, and acceptance.

4. **Community-based health organizations can often provide the resources churches need to educate and support members.** Churches do not need to handle this responsibility alone. Partnering with health
organizations and local nonprofits can help educate faith leaders, congregants, and the broader community about HIV prevention, care, and treatment. In addition, parishioners who work as health care providers may also be able to provide support.

5. Support from the Black Church encourages those dealing with HIV to educate and uplift others. Following Christ’s teachings, the Black Church should be a source of strength—a place where all African Americans are treated justly, with respect, and where they are welcomed, especially when marginalized by the community or society at large. Providing a supportive network helps those suffering from and impacted by HIV feel empowered to take command of their own health.

As faith leaders and individuals, we need to be honest about how our levels of compassion vary depending on the person or situation facing us. Think about how you may feel when ministering to or working with any of the following people:

- A man who has been fired.
- A woman who has been raped.
- A child with cancer.
- A person struggling with drug addiction.
- A person who is cheating on his or her spouse.
- A grieving person who is angry at God.
- A person recently released from prison or jail.
- An adolescent gang member.
- A person who is HIV-positive.

How would you connect with each of these individuals? Would your attitude towards them be guided by God’s love and kindness? As the parable above demonstrates, as faith leaders, we sometimes fall short of providing the compassion deserved by all, including those infected with and affected by HIV.

People are spiritually and emotionally aware of how we feel about them, especially when they are hurting. Even if we pray for and with them, our words and body language can expose what is in our hearts. Let us make a commitment to allow the love and compassion of Jesus to be expressed through us to each person whose path we cross.

Anyone who affirms the Gospel must accept everyone—just as Jesus did—regardless of his or her situation or condition. We need to commit now to being the Body of Christ with appreciation for each person as a sacred creation through the glory of God Most High.
THE CALL TO ACTION

Your commitment to the Initiative and ending the HIV epidemic in the African-American community comes with a price—your time, your energy, and your active involvement. But the benefits greatly outweigh these costs. Your community needs you. Your church and flock need you. It is time to open the doors to everyone and help eliminate the stigma and social injustice that too often accompany HIV.

Your leadership is important. By reaching out to and speaking for those who need a voice—those who are unaware of their HIV status and those who do not think they are at risk—you will not only be following the teachings of Christ, but also advocating for social justice, just as our faith leaders did during the Civil Rights Movement. We ask you to join our efforts, lend your influential voice to the issues of equity and justice centered on HIV, and speak out to end the disparities facing our community.

It is time to get involved. It won’t be easy, but victory is possible if we work together as a community. We ask you to join our Initiative today and take part in one or more of the following activities:

READ THE INITIATIVE’S ACTIVITY MANUAL. The Activity Manual that accompanies this Pastoral Brief is a strategic guide to help you as a faith leader gain a deeper understanding of HIV as a social justice issue and get the tools you need to take action. It will help you learn how to discuss HIV from a place of faith, and how to integrate it into your ministry. It is also designed to help those who don’t have access to HIV-specific training in their area. The Activity Manual, while primarily for faith leaders, can also be used by appointed lay leaders to implement the Initiative at their church.

ENGAGE IN RECOMMENDED INITIATIVE ACTIVITIES. The Activity Manual outlines several ways for you to get involved. Eliminating HIV will take a great effort, but with the help of the faith community and faith leaders like you, we can collectively end the epidemic currently plaguing the African-American community. After reviewing the Activity Manual and partnering with the Initiative, we ask that you and your church collaborate with us by engaging in one or more Initiative activities, such as:
Attend a Faith Leader Training. The Faith Leader Training is a roughly two-hour long meeting, held in multiple cities and hosted by the NAACP, Gilead Sciences, and local leaders. During the meeting you will be introduced to The Black Church and HIV: The Social Justice Imperative Initiative; learn how HIV is affecting African Americans and local communities; increase your knowledge about HIV as a social justice issue; and find out how you can get involved with the Initiative.

Pray and Preach from the Pulpit about HIV as a Social Justice Issue. The Initiative wants you to use your voice to confront HIV as a social justice issue. We encourage you to pray and preach from the pulpit to engage your congregation. The Activity Manual includes recommendations for how faith leaders can incorporate messages of acceptance, understanding, and compassion for those impacted by HIV. These sermon message points are designed to help reduce stigma and the impact of HIV on African Americans.

Participate in the NAACP Day of Unity. The NAACP is proud to organize the Day of Unity to encourage prayer, preaching, and nationwide awareness about the impact of HIV on African Americans. The Day of Unity takes place on a select Sunday in June or July, when multiple faith leaders and churches from around the country stand in solidarity on this important issue.

Integrate Activities that Address HIV as a Social Justice Issue into Existing Church Programs and Ministries. It's likely your church already has regular health-related activities—diabetes education programs, blood pressure screenings, blood drives, and fitness sessions. You may also have homeless outreach programs and a prison ministry, as well as information sessions about financial literacy, home buying, and job skills. As part of the Initiative, we ask you to look for opportunities to integrate activities that address HIV as part of your church’s existing social justice programs.

By becoming an Initiative partner, you will serve as the voice of the Initiative and use the power of the pulpit to proclaim the Good News and “bind up the brokenhearted” as Isaiah 61:1 teaches us.

You can find out more about partnering with the Initiative by contacting us either at info@TheBlackChurchandHIV.org or by requesting information via the Initiative website (http://theblackchurchandhiv.org/contact-us/).

IN THE WORDS OF FAITH LEADERS
“We did not look at it through a thin lens—we looked at it overall. We looked to see where can we address homelessness, mental health, and HIV, and it wasn’t in a silo. It wound up being that where we can address HIV, is when we feed the homeless, we offer HIV testing. When we’re doing our ministry, sex and sexuality comes up in those conversations, so we address HIV, STDs, and healthier sexual relations then. For men, another social determinant is access to care—we don’t like to go to the doctor—so let’s address that from a wholeness perspective and look at optimal health. So we’re doing blood pressure, glucose testing, prostate screening, and HIV testing, and we’re doing all that without isolating, stigmatizing, and hiding HIV testing, so it’s very routine.”  

– Lead Servant. Rev. William Francis


