

Communiqué Pacanet 4th Pre-IACASA Conference

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 1st 2nd December 2011

Accelerating a Grassroots Church for a Sustainable HIV and AIDS Response

Report: Daniël Louw

Main outcome: In terms of the current UNAIDS slogan and perspective: zero discrimination; zero new infections; zero HIV & AIDS related deaths, we as a conference want to come up with the following strategic and mission statement: zero incompetent churches at grassroots level.

Main perspectives and overall topics

1. Paradigmatic Issues: The Shifting of Paradigms

The basic challenge is to move from destructive and negative paradigms (i.e. punishment and stigmatization) to constructive and life promoting paradigms focusing on the promotion of human identity and human dignity. There should be a shift from the clerical notion of formal office and church maintenance to daily life issues on grassroots level within the local framework of the African cultural context. The challenge will be how to harmonize faith and science, belief and life. What is most needed, besides the focus on preaching and the proclamation of the gospel (the prophetic task of the church), is the emphasis on: Who we (already) are in Christ (to be affirmed in our new identity due to the cross and resurrection of Christ) The implication of this affirmative approach is that the infection cannot rob us from our salvation and new status of redemption; affirmation is about the Christian hope as a new state of being and mind.

2. On Being the Church and Church Intervention: The Quest for Competence

What is most needed is the merging of a competent (appropriate) understanding of the content of our Christian faith with a competent understanding of how the church should respond appropriately to the needs of people living with HIV & AIDS. We would like to opt for an inclusive model: Do the right thing as well as being the “right church” on grassroots level (competence within). Inner competence: Appropriate personal responses (internalization); local responsibility; recognition of the impact and risk factors; compassionate involvement; unmasking stigma, discrimination and denial associated with HIV & AIDS. Outer competence: Technical competence and strategic planning; appropriate theological knowledge; networking within an inclusive social approach; promotion of dignity and hope. The bridge between inner and outer competence: leadership, knowledge and resources.

3. Sustainability: The Quest for Disciplined Motivation and Appropriate Spiritual Resources

Sustainability refers amongst others to: relevant development; outcomes/profit/result; benchmarking (indicators); long term motivation; sources and resources (inner resources). Sustainability includes also: Disciplined people; disciplined thought; and disciplined action. Sustainability incorporates the notion of the development of quality livelihoods: Think livelihoods and help people to help themselves!

4. Fundraising and Resources

There should be a shift from fundraising from abroad to fundraising within the capacity of the African setting; i.e. tapping the resources within local communities and believers (inner resources development). Financial resources should be linked with the development of “human capital”: invest in human potential development. However, there should still be attempts to appeal to external resources such as the Global Fund in order to safeguard sustainability of basic programs and services.

5. Prevention Care and Christian Education: Reframing the Notion of Human Sexuality

There is a deep seated conviction that the church should come up with a constructive educational model for the promotion of the understanding of human sexuality. Most needed are educational youth models on sex and sexuality from the perspective of Christian spirituality, beyond the merely “no-sex-before-marriage” paradigm. This shift includes: An understanding of the Christian spiritual purpose and meaning of human sexuality; an integrative understanding of our being human, beyond the schism (dualism) between body and soul; the sacredness of intercourse; the sanctification of the human body and its sexual functioning.

6. Mission and HIV & AIDS Care Giving Ministry: The Quest for a Grassroots Kingdom of God Model

HIV & AIDS should be mainstreamed within a missional approach. Emphasis should not be only laid on mainstreaming from without the church (service delivery to grassroots communities) but also from within (integrating HIV & AIDS related issues into programs of church ministries). On grassroots level this model implies: a small group approach; home care and ARV Treatment; a community focused approach; the incorporation of local people and identification of community leaders. With reference to care giving, special attention should be giving to Palliative Care: The attempt to improve the quality of life of patients, especially for those with life-limiting illness; it is supportive and symptom-oriented. Palliative care fills the gap between curative care and grief care (bereavement) and should be incorporated into home-based care giving. Care giving should be inclusive; i.e. not only focusing on HIV & AIDS but also on the broader spectrum of other opportunistic diseases and infections as related to the virus, for example TB and cancer.

7. Advocacy and Christian Leadership

Within the training of appropriate leaders the challenge is how to merge “activism” with the prophetic voice of the church. Training and leadership formation should focus on: passion; compassion; excellence (What can we do better?); the energizing of human potential and resources. Training should incorporate a participatory approach in order to develop human potentials on grassroots level. A training strategy should be operationalized as community mobilization. It is important that local projects should incorporate religious leaders infected and affected by HIV & AIDS, as well as people living with HIV & AIDS, as agents of change.

8. Gender and Human Vulnerability: Reframing Power

Whether male or female, we all are exposed to vulnerability and should be approached from the perspective of human dignity. Of paramount importance are the following issues: power abuse and the treatment of women; the position of males within feminist campaigns; the acknowledgement of the work done by women on grassroots level; the challenge how to incorporate males within “women care giving work”; loveless and inhumane stigmatization and discrimination within the realm of human sexuality.

9. Networking

The formation of new partnerships is vital. It includes: North – South, as well as South- South partnerships; interdenominational cooperation; interfaith interaction; inclusion of both the private and public sector. How can we overcome “denominationalism” (barriers due to doctrine, church polity, and confessional issues) and join hands? Together we can do more and better.

10. The Interplay between the Social Media and Culturality

Within the impact of the media on human behavior, the church should explore avenues how to incorporate the media within the notions of advocacy and the communication of appropriate knowledge regarding HIV & AIDS; the link between cultural traditions and the notion of human sexuality. There should be meaningful alternatives. The discourse should take place within the interplay between culture, tradition and globalization: How can local cultures rediscover their cultural roots and values within new demands emanating from a secularized society?