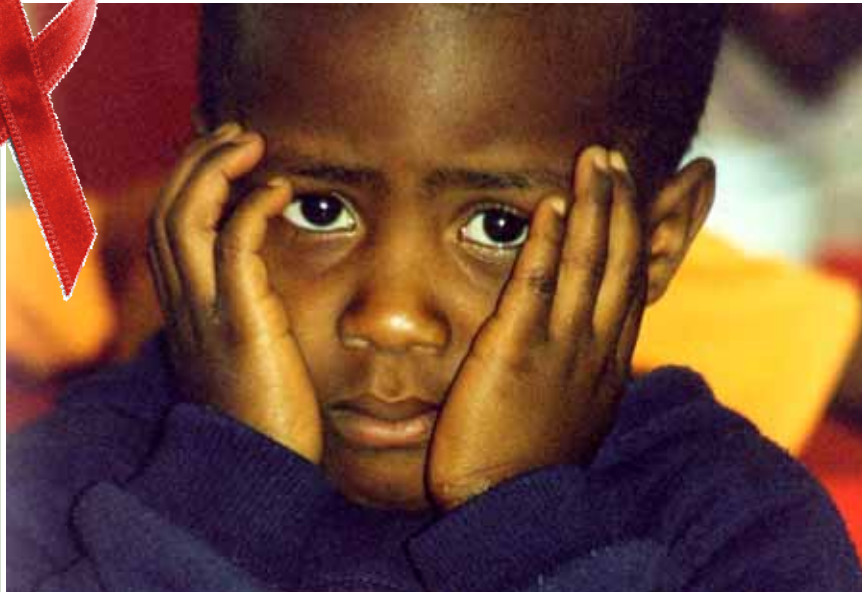


HIV&AIDS-POLICY

Association of Churches and Missions in South Western Germany

Evangelisches Missionswerk
in Südwestdeutschland e.V. (EMS)
Vogelsangstr.62 | 70197 Stuttgart

Association of Churches and Missions
in South Western Germany
Vogelsangstr.62 | 70197 Stuttgart



Association of Churches and
in South Western Germany

CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Theological and policy framework	4
The challenge of HIV&AIDS for the EMS Fellowship	5
The response of the EMS Fellowship to HIV&AIDS	6

INTRODUCTION

World-wide more than 60 million people have been infected with HIV so far and around 20 million of them have died. In 2008, there were 33 million people world-wide living with HIV. This year, 2.7 million people were newly infected with HIV and 2.1 million dies of AIDS – that is 5.900 people per day. More than 12 million children have been orphaned due to AIDS. More than 90% of all HIV infected persons live in developing countries.

HIV&AIDS constitute one of the most serious threats to human life in our era and represents one of the greatest problems for socio-economic development in many countries.

The EMS Secretariat and the churches and mission societies in the EMS Fellowship are also deeply affected by the epidemic and its impacts though in different ways.

Whereas the African partner churches in the EMS Fellowship have been faced with a dramatic increase in the number of HIV infections in the past few years, in particular the Moravian Church in South Africa, other churches are not confronted with the same infection rates yet. Nevertheless, growth rates show that in Asia the struggle is just beginning. Even in Germany where infection rates were kept low and stable for quite a long time, a new carelessness with the disease seems to have crept in recently. With the expansion of the European Union the HI virus and the AIDS disease have come very close to Central Europe.

For the EMS Fellowship HIV&AIDS pose a long-term challenge which requires an adequate and sustainable response.

As part of this response this HIV&AIDS Policy was submitted to the EMS Mission Council. Its purpose is twofold: it is meant to be a framework in which the EMS Secretariat can deal with and respond to AIDS in its activities (e.g. in the exchange of co-workers). In addition, it is meant to stimulate discussion with the EMS Fellowship so that we can learn from each other's experiences and assist each other. The course of the HIV&AIDS epidemic may change dramatically over the next few years. For this reason, it will be necessary to update and amend the HIV&AIDS Policy at regular intervals.

THEOLOGICAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

For many years, churches have not taken the HIV&AIDS pandemic seriously. As the spread of the virus was linked to sexuality and in particular homosexuality, they avoided to take a clear stand. Instead AIDS was often seen as a punishment from God for sinful behaviour. This situation has changed. Churches now accept the challenge the pandemic has placed on their faith and theology.

In its Mission Statement, EMS has emphasised that the content of its mission is to respond to God's compassionate and transforming love (point 2): "Our witness finds expression in signs of living solidarity. In reconciling and healing communities we share life as well as suffering," (point 8). We have realised that our churches are called to a ministry of healing. Healing goes beyond physical recovery - this is what the gospel tells us in Jesus' acts of healing. It is experienced on different levels, e.g. when a person feels spiritually, socially or psychologically regenerated and reintegrated. One of the major challenges for the churches is therefore to work towards overcoming the stigmatisation and marginalisation of people living with HIV.

Moreover, as the people infected are often members of our churches, they are members of the body of Christ, and their disease affects the whole church directly. Their illness reminds the church of its real identity as a community of the weak and vulnerable, founded only on the power of God's love in Jesus.

We realise that the challenge of HIV&AIDS calls us to strive for a new understanding of sexuality, to overcome taboos and search for more open and responsible ways to communicate about sexuality in the church. The fear of talking about the gift of human sexuality as well as addressing the topics of sexual abuse, violence and exploitation has contributed to the spread of HIV and to the silence surrounding AIDS

Human rights are mentioned in the Mission Statement as an aim EMS wants to work toward (point 8). The most basic human right is the right to life. This right is denied where people are excluded from the human community and when they are deprived of the available means to treat a deadly disease. Our commitment to take up the challenge of HIV&AIDS is not rooted in an attitude of mercy but in the respect for the human dignity of all God's children.

The EMS policy framework has placed the focus on "life concerns" as one of the core tasks of EMS. The issue of HIV&AIDS is acknowledged as having a high priority among life concerns.

Within the focus of "life concerns" ...

- ... we commit ourselves to strive for human dignity and the rights of people infected by HIV&AIDS. We do not regard HIV infection as the result of personal sin or failure but rather see it within the context of people's vulnerability to HIV infection, organised violence, gender inequality, lack of access to health care and information, and poverty. This aspect includes the struggle to ensure equal access to appropriate medical treatment for all those suffering from AIDS in all countries.
- ... we commit ourselves to reduce the stigmatisation and discrimination which add to the suffering of people infected by HIV&AIDS. We ensure that people living with HIV&AIDS are supported and are integrated in our programmes and church activities.
- ... we commit ourselves anew to strive for "a just community of men and women" (point 8 of the Mission Statement). As women are most vulnerable and suffer most from the pandemic, we see it as our task to overcome gender inequality within our churches and particularly sensitise men to reflect on their role behaviour.
- ... we commit ourselves to openly discuss the issue of HIV&AIDS within the EMS Fellowship and to make ourselves strong for those among us suffering from HIV&AIDS. To do this more effectively we support existing networks such as the [»» Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance](#).

THE CHALLENGE OF HIV&AIDS FOR THE EMS FELLOWSHIP

1. The EMS Fellowship identifies HIV&AIDS as a priority issue. The churches and mission societies within the EMS Fellowship are therefore requested to gather information on the epidemiological situation in their country and enter into contact with networks and NGO's already working in this area. The causes of the spread of the virus may differ from situation to situation. Depending on the situation in a particular country, the present main challenge to each church may also differ from that in another country. The churches are requested to challenge the practices and traditions that promote the spread of HIV&AIDS and to formulate their own response to the challenge of HIV&AIDS in their society. This may result in the formulation of an AIDS Policy of their own.
2. The EMS Fellowship acknowledges the devastating impact the HIV&AIDS pandemic has not only on individuals but on whole societies and communities. It urges the churches to observe the developments within their societies which lead to impoverishment and deprivation, and to renew their commitment to those affected most.
3. The HIV&AIDS pandemic requires that it is not treated as one subject or a special programme among others but that it is regarded as a cross-cutting issue within the EMS Fellowship. An adequate response can only be what is generally called "mainstreaming". Mainstreaming HIV&AIDS means that the issue of HIV&AIDS is dealt with at all levels of the organisation and integrated in all planning of programmes and projects. Mainstreaming does not necessarily imply that additional fund-raising is needed. The EMS Fellowship is committed to embark on this mainstreaming process.
4. The EMS Fellowship appreciates the high priority of HIV&AIDS by continuing to support existing AIDS programmes and local congregations in caring for HIV-positive people and risk groups and by encouraging churches to embark on new programmes in the area of prevention and education, particularly in Asia.
5. The EMS Fellowship advises theological training institutions to include the topic of HIV&AIDS in their curricula. Ministers should be trained by courses to be able to meet the challenge of pastoral care and to break the silence. They should be sensitised in particular to the gender aspect.
6. The EMS Fellowship recommends reflection on sexual ethics and human relations in the light of the pandemic, and to address taboo issues such as sexuality, death and dying in order to combat the pandemic adequately, to raise awareness and to create conditions that will enable people to choose responsible practices in sexual relations with each other.
7. The EMS Fellowship encourages all churches to make use of the opportunity to learn from each other and from the experiences of other churches and institutions. The Mission Council intends produce regular reports on this issue.

THE RESPONSE OF THE EMS FELLOWSHIP TO HIV&AIDS

In order to respond to the challenges of HIV&AIDS, great importance is attached to the issue at organisational and programme level.

1. Information and education on HIV&AIDS for staff, volunteers, ecumenical co-workers and partnership groups
 - Staff members in the Secretariat will receive training to acquire "AIDS competence". This will include information on HIV&AIDS in general, modes of transmission and effective means of prevention. Special counselling and information on HIV&AIDS will be provided to EMS staff visiting projects and partner churches.
 - In preparation for their work in partner churches, volunteers will receive adequate information on the specific HIV&AIDS situation in their host country. Young non-professional volunteers are particularly vulnerable. They will therefore receive special information concerning their personal risk of HIV infection and how to protect themselves.
 - Special attention will be given to information and education on HIV&AIDS in preparation courses for ecumenical co-workers. Co-workers facing problems related to HIV&AIDS during their stay at host churches will receive counselling to help them cope with the situation.
 - In order to support church solidarity groups to address HIV&AIDS within their own congregations and during visits to their partner churches, EMS will provide information by offering workshops specifically addressing HIV&AIDS issues or including it regularly on the agenda of partnership group meetings and in church work in congregations. Special emphasis will be placed on the topic of discrimination and stigmatisation which also exist in Germany.

2. **HIV&AIDS testing and care**
 - Within the EMS Fellowship a voluntary HIV&AIDS test will be encouraged with voluntary counselling and testing. If individuals are prepared to take the test, full confidentiality will be guaranteed. Qualified staff will ensure careful pre- and post-test counselling. A positive HIV test will be not constitute grounds for exclusion from employment as staff member or co-worker, ecumenical co-worker or as participant in a volunteer programme.
 - If necessary, all staff, volunteers and ecumenical co-workers will receive post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) to reduce the risk of HIV infection. This will apply especially to those working in health care activities and after forced sexual encounters.
 - EMS will intensify networking with other missions and church agencies in this area. A common policy regarding legal and financial aspects of securing access to treatment will be developed for all members of the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany.

3. Mainstreaming

- Mainstreaming will be undertaken in all regions and departments. An HIV&AIDS analysis, with a special gender perspective on HIV&AIDS, will be integrated in all programme planning activities in order to address the causes and impacts of HIV&AIDS and to reduce the risks.
- In order to raise world-wide awareness of HIV&AIDS, the topic of HIV&AIDS will be regularly addressed in publications. Besides information on specific HIV&AIDS programmes and activities, publications will aim to increase knowledge concerning HIV&AIDS and modes of transmission and address taboo issues, e.g. homosexuality and gender violence.
- The International Advisory Board and the HIV&AIDS network will serve as a task force to address all matters related to HIV&AIDS on a continuous basis within the EMS Fellowship. These groups, in co-operation with the EMS HIV&AIDS Co-ordinator, will be responsible for developing an action plan and strategies, and for networking the various departments in the process of mainstreaming HIV&AIDS within the EMS Secretariat.

4. Advocacy and lobbying work

EMS is committed to advocacy and lobbying work to prevent new infections and improve treatment and care for those already living with HIV&AIDS world-wide. EMS is a member of the German "Action against AIDS" (Aktionsbündnis gegen AIDS). "Action against AIDS" is a network of more than 50 churches, church-related and secular organisations whose aims are to lobby the German government to increase their spending on the global fight against HIV&AIDS and to raise public awareness about HIV&AIDS in both the church and non-church sectors. EMS will employ an HIV&AIDS Co-ordinator (on a limited contract) with financial support from the churches.

For further information please contact:

Andrea Pfeiffer, EMS HIV&AIDS Co-ordinator, E-mail: pfeiffer@ems-online.org

Adopted by the EMS Mission Council, Herrnhut, 24 June 2005

(Editorial changes made by the Management Board in January 2008 approved by the Working Committee and adopted on 28 January 2008).

(Adapted to the latest EMS language standards in March 2009, contents unchanged.)