

Act Justly Update 12

Leading and pioneering

In 2006, 4.3 million people around the world were newly diagnosed with HIV – the highest-ever rate of infection. To meet this global challenge, a global response is needed. So this year, members of the World AIDS Campaign – an international organisation formed to support and connect HIV campaigns worldwide – are uniting to make a strong call for outspoken leadership and courageous action on the issue.

Christian Aid supports and encourages churches and other organisations around the world to pioneer actions that raise awareness, challenge stereotypes or support people living with HIV. Through the World AIDS Campaign we want to unite people around the world who are leading the fight against the virus.

Welcome

As a group, write on a large piece of paper the names of people who are great leaders. On a separate piece of paper, write down the ways in which they lead others and the character traits that good leaders possess.

Worship

1. As a group, read Psalm 23. Encourage conversation and reflection on the way that the Lord leads his followers.
2. Listen to, or sing, songs reflecting the themes of God's faithfulness and commitment to lead us. Perhaps include 'The Lord's My Shepherd' (Stuart Townend, 1996)
3. Using the thoughts gathered in the opening activity, lead prayers thanking God for his gift of leadership and to recognise the positive difference that people make to the world when leading others.

Abebe was one of the first people in his community to openly admit to being HIV-positive. By taking this bold stand, he faced the consequences of stigma associated with HIV – a stigma that is prevalent throughout much of the world. However, he found a great source of support in the Hope Centre, a project run by the local Ethiopian Orthodox Christian community and a Christian Aid partner organisation.

The honesty with which Abebe faced his diagnosis, and the way in which the church responded, has challenged many people in his community to change their views about HIV and AIDS.

The encouragement that Abebe received from the Hope Centre counsellor helped him see that he could live a full life despite his diagnosis. Abebe now works with the organisation, helping to challenge the stigma associated with the virus.

He explains that, although stereotyping and a lack of knowledge are a problem locally, HIV-positive people also tend to isolate themselves from the rest of the community, or refuse to admit – even to themselves – that they are sick.

By reducing fear and misunderstanding in the community, individuals are much more willing to deal with the reality of their situation.



Abebe (left) was one of the first people to speak openly about living with HIV. He has faced a lot of stigma, especially from his family, but the Church has openly supported him. Girma (right), Abebe's counsellor, visits him regularly to give psychological support and training on nutrition and first aid

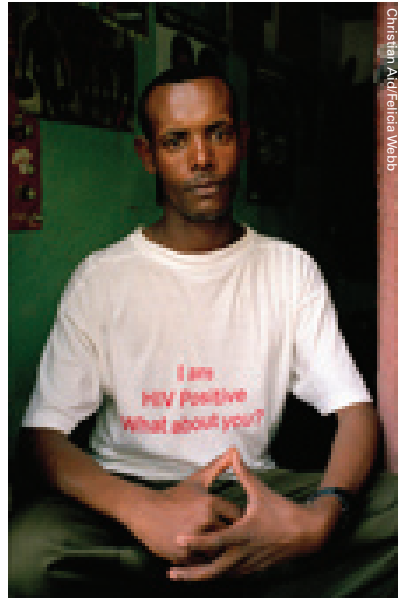
Word

Prophets and pioneers

Throughout the Old Testament, God calls people to speak out and take action on his behalf. However, whether they were challenging injustice and suffering, or calling people back to faithfulness to God, the people involved often remained less than convinced about their ability to successfully complete the task.

But God continually calls upon people to follow his lead. He asks them to speak out and challenge injustice when others are afraid; to take action and demand justice when others are unable to do so for themselves.

1. Read *Exodus 3:1–17*.
2. In verse 11, Moses questions whether he is the right person for the task. How does God respond? What does this teach us about God's relationship with the people he chooses to lead?
3. In verse 13, Moses is uncertain about God's authority to question the actions of the Pharaoh. How does God respond? In what ways can this give us confidence to take action today?
4. This passage can teach us about how to guide people away from situations of suffering. In what ways can the church take a lead to support people living with HIV?



Abebe challenges the negative stereotypes that surround HIV and AIDS, and by doing so helps to improve the lives of many people in his community

If you have more time...

You may like to do some further study, either with the group or as an individual at a later date. If so, continue to read the story of Moses and the exodus of the Israelites. Consider the role of the Israelites in the events. How do they support Moses? How does their participation help bring about God's purposes?

Our response

Continue to reflect on the conversations you have had as a group. Consider how you can use this time to make a decision to participate in the global movement to fight HIV and AIDS. Commit to taking action. For example, you could:

- visit www.christianaid.org.uk/stoppoverty/hiv to find out more about how Christians around the world are making a difference
- make a donation to Christian Aid and support our work with projects like the Hope Centre at www.christianaid.org.uk/give
- join others around the world to mark World AIDS Day on 1 December. If there is no event planned near you, perhaps your group could take the lead and organise one. See www.worldaidsdaycampaign.info

Prayer

Lead a time of prayer about the issues raised in this discussion.