

SOUTHERN AFRICAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE POLICY ON HIV/AIDS FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

The HIV/AIDS crisis presents the church, and all of society today, with a major challenge. It raises for Christians questions of morality, sin and God's providence. It confronts people with the reality of death and therefore with questions about the meaning of life and the after-life, not to mention the theological questions about why God allows people to suffer and die in this way. It also raises difficult questions about, among others, human relationships.

The Christian view of morality focuses on how human beings relate to one another and how we take responsibility for one another. It calls for both self-giving and patient understanding of others, which is more demanding than simply keeping the law. The HIV/AIDS crisis reveals not simply the existence of sin but more significantly the absence of care and love for people in their suffering.

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is often spread through ignorance and negligence. In terms of morality, we must face the sinfulness of remaining ignorant and of not doing everything in our power to prevent the spread of HIV.

Our moral awareness and attitudes have to grow and develop. Perhaps the HIV/AIDS crisis is God's way of challenging us to care for one another and to appreciate the gift of life. HIV/AIDS is not merely a crisis, it also presents an opportunity for moral and spiritual growth. The modern epidemic of HIV/AIDS calls for a pastoral response.

A PASTORAL RESPONSE

Jesus, in his ministry, seeks to overcome the prejudice, suspicion and fear that surrounds diseases such as leprosy, which alienated people from their families and communities.

This attitude must inspire the corresponding attitude in Catholic school communities towards those living with HIV/AIDS.

Policy

The Catholic school should respond to the HIV/AIDS crisis by establishing a Pastoral Care Committee. The committee must be responsible for developing an overall Pastoral Care policy and programme for the school.

The policy and programme must include an approach to the HIV/AIDS crisis which is consistent with the teaching of the Catholic Church and the National Policy on HIV/AIDS for learners and educators in public schools and students and educators in Further Education and Training Institutions (Government Gazette No. 20372, Notice 1926 of 1999).

Particular attention must be given to the non-discrimination requirements of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (Act No. 98 of 1996).

DUTY TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF HIV/AIDS

The threat to human life posed by HIV/AIDS is so serious that organisations and individuals have a moral duty to prevent its spread. There are two areas of particular importance. The first is the responsible dissemination of information and the second is acting in a responsible way as regards sexual relationships.

Individual members of a school community have a duty to become reasonably well informed about HIV/AIDS. Willful ignorance about so serious a matter is sinful.

Policy

The Catholic school is required to implement a comprehensive programme of HIV/AIDS education at all levels, including the various levels of staff, and in all grades.

The programme should be integrated into all learning areas and must provide information in a manner that is responsible and consistent with the teaching of the Church. Curriculum materials used must reflect consistency with Church teaching on relationships, sexuality, marriage and contraception.

The Codes of Conduct adopted for learners, educators and non-educator staff must include provisions regarding the unacceptability of behaviour that discriminates against people with HIV/AIDS and behaviour that may create the risk of HIV transmission.

A programme of sexuality education that is aimed at behaviour modification should be implemented across the curriculum. Special consideration must be given to the requirements of a culture of respect for the God-given dignity of the human person and the understanding that sexual union is the expression of a loving human relationship that has reached the stage of a mutual commitment to each other for life, in marriage.

The HIV/AIDS and sexuality education programmes should include the promotion of social norms against drug and sexual abuse as well as irresponsible sexual behaviour and sexual violence.

All educators responsible for implementing the education programmes should receive appropriate training in HIV/AIDS and sexuality education through a school-based formation programme.

The Catholic school will implement the provisions of the National Policy on HIV/AIDS for learners and educators in public schools and students and educators in Further Education and Training Institutions (Government Gazette No. 20372, Notice 1926 of 1999).

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Pastoral Statement on AIDS, Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, January 1990

National Policy on HIV/AIDS for learners and educators in public schools and students and educators in Further Education and Training Institutions (Government Gazette No. 20372, Notice 1926 of 1999).