

Coming to Say Goodbye Stories of AIDS in Africa

Discussion and Study Guide for Educators

Winner of New York Festivals World Medal
Video Library Rating ☆☆☆



- I Introduction
- II Background Information
- III Viewing Discussions and Activities:
 - A. Before viewing the video
 - B. After viewing the video

- IV Selected References
 - A. HIV/AIDS: Basic Information
 - B. Organizations and Web Sites
 - C. Related Videos

I Introduction:

HIV and AIDS are familiar acronyms throughout the media. HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) destroys the immune system, leaving the body vulnerable to infections and diseases that people with normal immune systems either rarely get or can combat effectively. AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is the end stage of the HIV infection. AIDS affects individuals, families, societies and entire nations. The continent of Africa is being devastated socially and economically by this disease.

In *Coming to Say Goodbye*, we see five people living with AIDS, several children orphaned due to AIDS, parents, care givers, church workers and educators. Their experiences help us to link the personal reality of HIV/AIDS (poverty, lack of medicines and other resources) to world economic and trade policies. They give voice to the weakness and inadequacy of the current international response to the AIDS pandemic.

II Background Information **Scope of AIDS Pandemic**

At the end of 2002, the UNAIDS organization reported that over 40 million people are infected with HIV worldwide. During 2002, over 3 million persons died of AIDS and there were 5 million new infections worldwide. Over 13 million children have been orphaned since the beginning of the pandemic. About 28 million people infected with HIV are in Sub-Saharan Africa. In parts of the continent, 36% of the people are infected with HIV; of those 58% are women. Some African countries have lost a generation of people; others have experienced a 20- to 30-year reduced life expectancy.

In addition to the devastation in Sub-Saharan Africa, Russia, China and India are predicted to undergo the next major outbreaks of HIV/AIDS. Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas, has 67% of the AIDS cases in the region. There is also concern about a rapid spread of the disease in

Latin America, where effective responses are lacking.

Prevention, Testing and Treatment

Social stigmas, cultural taboos, fears, and myths about sexuality and human relationships hinder efforts to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS. The disease has caused discrimination in work, school and, often, health care. Many people are afraid to be tested, fearing their families will be segregated and persecuted if they are infected with HIV. Testing facilities are scarce in many countries and some people do not want to know their HIV status. Programs about how HIV is transmitted are important to prevent people from contracting the disease or from infecting others. Countries in which prevention programs are a priority have reduced the rates of the disease.

Access to Affordable Medicines

An effective and essential response to the AIDS pandemic includes access to affordable medicines. The medicines administered in *Coming to Say Goodbye* are aspirins, pain killers, and antifungals or antibiotics, used to relieve pain and suffering or to control opportunistic diseases and infections (those that affect people with a compromised immune system). They do not include the antiretrovirals for AIDS. Due to their high cost, antiretrovirals are currently available to only 2% of persons with the virus worldwide. While AIDS medications are not a cure, they let people live longer, hold jobs, care for their children, and contribute to society.

World Policies Affecting Health Care in Debtor Countries

Africa and other debtor countries are forced to limit public funding for health services and education by structural adjustment policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (in which the U.S. plays a major policy-setting role). For there to be any hope of curbing the rates of the disease, policies on debt, trade, and foreign aid need to be challenged and changed in response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Trade policies should facilitate the availability of affordable medicines, rather than limit them in favor of the protection of intellectual property or patent holders who seek to make a profit on pharmaceutical sales.

What Can You Do About Global HIV/AIDS? Suggestions for individuals and groups are available on the Internet along with this study guide. Also available is a comprehensive 19-question, general quiz with answers about facts and myths surrounding HIV/AIDS. See: www.maryknollmall.org

III Viewing Discussions:

A. Options before viewing the video.

- 1) Briefly review background information with the group or class before introducing the video. Ask viewers to spend a minute in silence to remember someone who has died of AIDS or is living with HIV, as are the people from Tanzania and Kenya whom they will meet in the video.
- 2) Assign viewers to focus on specific persons (e.g. Rosalyn, Ali, Winfreda, Christopher and his brothers, family members, care givers etc.), or on topics (e.g. the situation of orphans, access to medicines etc). Have them observe the differences between having AIDS in Tanzania or Kenya

versus a developed country.

3) Test viewers' first-hand knowledge about HIV/AIDS with the following Global AIDS Quiz:

1. Approximately how many people around the world are currently living with HIV/AIDS?

- a. 800,000 b. 22 million c. 30 million d. 41 million

2. Every day, how many people around the world die of AIDS?

- a. 2,500 b. 4,000 c. 8,500 d. 10,600

3. By 2010, it is estimated that how many children will be orphaned due to AIDS?

- a. 800 thousand b. 4.5 million c. 25 million

4. What percentage of those living with AIDS today have access to AIDS medicines (antiretrovirals)?

- a. 2 % b. 18% c. 25% d. 45%

5. About \$7-10 billion is needed annually to fight global AIDS. What amount has been contributed to the Global Fund for AIDS from all sources?

- a. \$800,000 b. \$1.5 billion c. \$ 500 million d. \$6 billion

6. What percentage of our gross national product does the U.S. spend on official international development?

- a. Less than 1/10 of 1% b. 1% c. 5% d. 8%

Answers: 1:d, 2:c, 3:c, 4.a, 5. b, 6. a (Based on statistics from December 2002. For updates refer to www.unaids.org/index.html)

B. Options after viewing the video:

1) Allow time for participants to be able to absorb what they have seen. (This video can leave people feeling emotionally drained and discussion can be difficult at first.)

2) Have viewers note what touched them most and share their reflections in small groups of four to five people, later reporting to the whole group.

3) Ask viewers to reflect on what affected them most. What are the differences about being ill with the HIV infection in Africa and being ill with the HIV infection in the U.S.?

4) Have different groups reflect on the following topics:

Orphans: What do their lives (Christopher and his brothers, Veneranda and Jenesta or Winfreda) and other orphans hold? What are the biggest problems they will have to face? Many of the orphans are themselves are infected with HIV, having received the virus from their mothers. What is the impact of so many orphans on society?

Women and AIDS: In some areas, 58% of Africans living with HIV are women. Think about Rosalyn, who farmed her land, the mother of Christopher and his brothers, Bibi (grandmother), and the mother of Ali. Why are women so affected by this disease? What is the impact of their

illness and death on their families, communities and society?

Access to affordable medicines: Patients in the video do not have access to antiretroviral medicines for AIDS. Health care workers give them aspirins, pain killers, and antibiotics to relieve their pain and suffering, and to control opportunistic diseases associated with HIV infection. Why are so many people dying of AIDS in Africa when in North America and Europe people are living with the disease? Why do Africans not have antiretroviral AIDS medicines? Should they have them? What can we do? What does the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights have to do with this issue? www.un.org

(5) Reflect on the following quotations:

“... There has to be a worldwide effort to restore the peoples of Africa....Without that I see that the problems of this continent will reach a point where there will be animals and not people in this continent basically. Sometimes it looks like it’s the purpose of the developed countries to depopulate Africa.” (Dr. Margaret Ogola, Eastern Deanery AIDS Relief Program, Nairobi, Kenya) Why does she say this? What is our response?

“I think that it must cost more to test a fighter jet for 1/2 minute than to feed a child for a whole year. Let us make wise policies, not as a specific nation, but as a human race.” (George Owiso, sociology teacher, Mathare Valley Informal School, Nairobi, Kenya) How do you think our government should respond to George’s statement? What kinds of policies can we influence?

“AIDS is now acknowledged as the worst plague humankind has ever faced. Years from now people will ask about AIDS, as with the holocaust, “How could they have known -- and failed to act?” (Salih Booker, Exec. Director, Africa Action) As part of the international community, what are the people and the government of the United States doing to respond? What more needs to be done? What can you and I do to make this happen?

IV Selected References (For more AIDS information):

A. Basic Information

Basics of HIV/AIDS: Questions Most Frequently Asked, AEGIS (AIDS Education Global Information Service) www.aegis.com/topics.FAQ.html

Understanding Debt: World Bank, IMF and structural adjustment www.jubileeusa.org See: “Learn More: A Beginners Guide to Debt”

Access to Affordable Medicines: Doctors Without Borders www.doctorswithoutborders.org and TRIPS (Trade Related International Property Rights) www.woafrica.org/AIDS33.html

Funding Needed to Combat Global HIV/AIDS: TRIPS (Trade Related International Property Rights) www.woafrica.org/AIDS33.html See: “Confusing Dollars”

Effective Advocacy: Church World Service www.capwiz.com/churchworld/home and Maryknoll Missioners www.maryknoll.org/GLOBAL/OFFICE/imptinfo.html

B. Organizations and Web Sites:

Doctors Without Borders has launched a campaign on access to affordable medicines which includes work around lobbying the World Trade Organization's Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights council to make medicines more accessible to the developing world.

www.accessmed-msf.org/index.asp

Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility works through investment holdings of various religious institutions to challenge corporate leadership to make changes in corporate policy to reflect socially responsibly actions. www.iccr.org

Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance is a global ecumenical network for international cooperation in advocacy on HIV/AIDS and global trade www.e-alliance.ch

Maryknoll AIDS Task Force provides resources for prayer and action, as well as stories about the impact of HIV/AIDS on the lives of people in the in the developing world.

www.maryknoll.org/GLOBAL/AIDS/gc-intro

UNAIDS Web Site is an excellent resource for new reports, updates on the Global Fund, press releases on global initiatives to combat AIDS and information on the spread of Global AIDS.

www.unaids.org/index.html

C. Related Videos:

A Generation of Hope, United Methodist Church: General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church 2002. Available from EcuFilm, 800-251-4091.

Zimbabwe: Fight for Life, Catholic Relief Services 2002. www.catholicrelief.org

Yes to Life, Maryknoll Sister Mary Annel, a medical doctor, treats people with AIDS in El Salvador 1995. Maryknoll Sisters, PO Box 509, Maryknoll, NY 10545, 914-941-7575.

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HIV/AIDS Quiz

1. HIV is the same thing as AIDS.
 - a) True
 - b) False
2. You can catch HIV from toilets and mosquitos.
 - a) True
 - b) False
3. Which of the following is NOT true?
 - a) Sharing a needle for a tattoo might give you HIV.
 - b) Sharing a needle for piercing might give you HIV.
 - c) Donating blood might give you HIV.
4. Which of the following is a myth?
 - a) You can't get HIV from having sex just once with an infected person.
 - b) HIV destroys a person's ability to fight infection.
 - c) Globally, infection rates are higher for women than for men.
5. A person who looks healthy...
 - a) can't possibly have the HIV virus.
 - b) might have the HIV virus.
 - c) probably doesn't have the HIV virus.
6. The HIV test looks for...
 - a) the HIV virus.
 - b) the AIDS virus.
 - c) antibodies to the HIV virus.
7. Which behavior has a HIGH risk of HIV infection?
 - a) Vaginal, oral or anal sex without a condom.
 - b) Light kissing and hugging someone with HIV.
 - c) Swimming in a pool with someone who has HIV.
8. An HIV infected mother can pass the virus on to her unborn child.
 - a) True
 - b) False
9. All babies who test positive for HIV at birth develop AIDS later.
 - a) True
 - b) False
10. A person can test HIV-negative but still be infected with HIV.
 - a) True
 - b) False

11. A person can have HIV for 10 years or more before symptoms appear.
a) True
b) False
12. Men are physiologically more at risk for HIV than women.
a) True
b) False
13. Which is NOT true?
a) If you know you have HIV, you can get medicines to help you stay healthy.
b) If you know you are HIV positive, you can take steps to NOT infect others.
c) It's better not to know if you have HIV.
14. Which is NOT true? Medicines that have been developed...
a) are not very expensive.
b) must be taken on a regular schedule.
c) have unpleasant side-effects.
15. Worldwide the number of people infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, is decreasing.
a) True
b) False
16. AIDS is curable.
a) True
b) False
17. Someone who is diagnosed with AIDS at age 25 could have gotten the virus when he/she was 15 years old.
a) True
b) False
18. All sexual activity carries a risk of contracting HIV.
a) True
b) False
19. Which group has the fastest growing number of HIV infections worldwide?
a) Men in their 40's.
b) Gay men.
c) Women and teenagers.

Answers: 1. (b) False; 2. (b) False; 3.(c); . 4. (a); 5. (b); 6. (c); 7. (a); 8. (a) True; 9. (b) False; 10. (a) True; 11. (a) True; 12. (b) False; 13.(c); 14 (a); 15. (b) False; 16. (b) False; 17. (a) True; 18. (b) False; 19. (c).

WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT GLOBAL HIV/AIDS

In class discussions or group meetings, remember those living with HIV around the world and those who have died of AIDS.

Educational Activities:

- * Ask one member of the class or group to check web sites with updates on combating HIV & AIDS and to keep others informed. Web Sites: www.unaids.org, www.ncan.org, www.aegis.com, www.doctorswithoutborders.org
- * Invite someone who has worked in HIV/AIDS in another country to speak to your class or community group.
- * View the Maryknoll video *Coming to Say Goodbye: Stories of AIDS in Africa* (1-800-227-8523). Show it in your school, parish or local community, then pledge to do something in response. Your response might include legislative advocacy (see below).
- * Learn more about antiretroviral medicines for AIDS, the pharmaceutical industry, the obstacles around drug patents and the unavailability of affordable AIDS medicines. (Note: the medicines given in the video *Coming to Say Goodbye: Stories of AIDS in Africa* are not antiretroviral AIDS medicines; they are medications to ease pain and suffering caused by opportunistic infections.)
- * Learn about daily life and poverty through exercises in “Hungry Decisions,” simulated game from Church World Service web site: www.churchworldservice.org/decisions/index.html

Community Activities

- * Hold special liturgies, prayer services or healing services around HIV/AIDS. Materials are available from National Catholic AIDS Network www.ncan.org; Catholic Charities AIDS Ministry, Portland, (503-963-8102) or the Maryknoll AIDS Task Force (914-941-7636, Ex. 5727 or sweissert@mksisters.org). For ecumenical materials see: www.woaafrica.org/AIDS30.html
- * Help market products made by people with AIDS: Find out about Cambodian quilts from the Maryknoll AIDS Task Force at: http://www.maryknoll.org/GLOBAL/AIDS/gc_intro.htm. Music and beautiful South African AIDS pins are available from Church World Service. www.churchworldservice.org
- * Commemorate World AIDS Day (December 1). On the Sunday nearest to World AIDS Day ask your parish to pray together an AIDS prayer. Ensure that each parishioner goes home with a copy of the prayer (see www.maryknoll.org/GLOBAL/AIDS/gc_aidpoem.html for a sample prayer). Establish a link with a particular AIDS program overseas and hold a prayer campaign for that program.
- * Orphans of parents who have died of AIDS frequently cannot go to school, lacking fees or books. Organize your local school or parish to respond to this need. Contact the Maryknoll AIDS Task Force office for information. www.maryknoll.org/GLOBAL/AIDS/gc-intro

Legislative Advocacy:

* Find out if your diocese has a social action office or an advocacy network and make certain that Global AIDS issues are part of their activities. Sample policy statements and issue FAQ's are available on this web site: www.maryknoll.org/GLOBAL/global.htm

* Know your local and national congresspersons. Invite them to HIV/AIDS events and tell them of your interest in global AIDS. Provide them with background information when AIDS issues are being addressed in Congress.

* Write to Congress and the President. Remember that contact with your senators and representatives does not have to be a one time letter. Work toward dialogue, being as specific as possible. For sample letters and action suggestions on HIV/AIDS, see www.woafrica.org or www.maryknoll.org/GLOBAL/global.htm

* When you hear that your legislator has supported funding or legislation favorable to people living with HIV/AIDS, be certain to thank him/her for their efforts.

* Knowing that there is more to HIV/AIDS than just the disease, you might also address the following concerns:

* **Donate the Dollars:** Globally \$1.4 billion was spent on AIDS in 2001. At least \$10 billion each year is now required!

* **Drop the Debt:** The majority of the world's poorest nations suffering from AIDS still spend more money repaying debts than on healthcare. There is widespread consensus that this must change!

* **Treat the People:** Essential medicines, including antiretrovirals, must be made available at prices the poorest can afford.

NOTE: Given the continuing mail delivery difficulties to government offices, it is best to fax your representatives and senators. Go to www.house.gov and www.senate.gov for information. Make sure to note that you are a constituent! For the White House, phone 202-456-1111; fax at 202-456-2461; or president@whitehouse.gov

**Be involved. Get the kids involved, get retired persons involved,
get everyone involved...**