

# **SPEECH BY THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR OF TLOKWE MUNICIPALITY, CLR MAPHETLE – MAPHETLE ON THE OCCASION OF THE HIV – AIDS VOLUTARY TESTING AND COUNSELING CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED AT THE METHODIST CHURCH , IKAGENG**

14 September 2008

I am honoured to be invited to address you today on a matter that so deeply affects South Africa, Africa and indeed the whole world.

HIV/AIDS has been with us for about three decades now, but it remains a problem whose solution continues to elude us all. We are making some progress in understanding this challenge, but we still have a long way to go in containing its spread.

Although people from all walks of life are affected, AIDS is hitting hard at the most vulnerable sections of our society. It is the poor, the illiterate, the marginalised, the women and the children who bear most of the burden of the HIV epidemic.

The face of HIV/AIDS in Ikageng has become more complex over the past 10 years. We are no longer only dealing with information and awareness, but with people that are faced with the reality of living with the disease. The vast majority of them are undiagnosed. They do not know their HIV status. Some of them are already falling ill but they do not know that their illnesses are related to HIV/AIDS. And even if they do know or suspect, they are reluctant to come out and talk about their condition.

I stand before you today to further consolidate our partnership in responding to this major challenge particularly the stigma that continues to be associated with it. We value your partnership because we know that every resident of Ikageng, every leader, bishop or priest has a special and unique role to play in combating HIV infection and caring for those living with HIV/AIDS.

The church has always played a role of caring for those who are weak and in need of support. The care that you have given has not been limited only to the message of hope and spiritual well-being. But you are able to initiate programmes that really make a difference in the lives of those in need of care, particularly the children.

I am convinced that the church can play a major role in fighting the stigma that is associated with HIV/AIDS and encourage openness and positive living amongst those who are infected and affected.

To ensure a common direction in the call for partnerships, the City Council of Tlokwe has committed itself to a broad national strategic plan designed to guide the country's response to HIV/AIDS. The plan outlines four priority areas, which are: (1) Prevention, (2) Treatment, Care and Support, (3) Research, Monitoring and Surveillance and (4) Human Rights.

There can be no doubt that the faith based community has a central role to play in the implementation of this plan.

#### COMMITMENT FROM THE CHURCH

There are numerous examples of how the faith sector is responding or can respond to this challenge. I will like to raise for discussion at least four key roles that Faith-based organisations and individual members of those organisations can play in responding to HIV/AIDS.

With regard to Education, we can

- Identify resources and models for prevention education
- Strengthen HIV/AIDS prevention through family enrichment
- Enhance HIV/AIDS prevention through youth programmes - building a solid foundation concerning sexuality, responsible adulthood and marriage, appreciating the youth and breaking the silence about sex

On Advocacy, we can:

- Campaign against discrimination
- Work together with government institutions in achieving appropriate levels of cost-effective health care, especially home based care
- Seek means to protect interests of particularly women and children
- On Worship, we can
- Establish an annual National Day of Prayer and Healing for all persons affected by the epidemic
- Establish an interfaith Day of Prayer and Healing

On Service, we can

- Provide care which involves encouraging and supporting those who are infected and affected
- Promote 'Family fostering' for those who have lost their parents or guardianas
- Take part in providing home care which may include:
  - Home visits for prayer and scripture reading
  - Meeting physical needs for food, clothing, medical attention
  - Assistance in planning for the future of the family particularly children
  - Support for orphaned children
  - Assisting with basic household activities such as shopping, cleaning the house or washing clothes

We are called by God to affirm a life of hope and healing in the midst of HIV/AIDS. Our traditions call us to embody and proclaim hope, and to celebrate life and healing in the midst of suffering.

We therefore need to send a positive message about HIV/AIDS. We need to tell people that just because you are HIV positive today, it does not mean you will get AIDS tomorrow and die. Co-factors such as poverty, high levels of mainly childhood malnutrition, vitamin A and iodine deficiency as well as lack of other micronutrients have a major impact on how one progress to full-blown AIDS.

We have to advise those infected and affected by HIV that by eating nutritious food, managing their stress, treating any infection promptly including sexually transmitted infections and using condoms, they can live longer and lead a healthy and productive life for many years.

We need to use this opportunity to declare our response to AIDS:

- We are called to love
- We are called to be compassionate and care
- We should commit ourselves to speaking publicly and promote HIV/AIDS prevention and ABC messages
- We should promote and provide care for those who are infected and affected
- We should fight the sins of discrimination and stigma
- We should work together with other sectors of society to seek ways of eliminating poverty

I strongly believe that if we can leave this church with a strong re-affirmation as the faithful members of the body of Christ in Ikageng, we will be able to provide hope for the faith community and for community as a whole: that in the spirit of love, compassion and care, through collective efforts to confront and to challenge discrimination and to empower our respective believers, we can overcome many of the challenges posed to us by HIV/AIDS.

Thank you