Hearing My Story: Destigmatizing HIV/AIDS

By Gregg S. Hunter II

On December 5, McCormick hosted Clergy and Lay Leadership Summit XI in recognition of World AIDS Day. The theme of the event focused on “A Way Forward: Overcoming Stigma and Statistics with Stories” and featured powerful preaching and workshops.

Rev. Reginald W. Williams Jr. of the First Baptist Church of University Park kicked off the event, delivering a word to help those in attendance hear a biblical perspective on the story of the stigmatized and marginalized members of society. Preaching from John 9 about the man born blind, he urged the audience to see people dealing with HIV/AIDS as Jesus saw people dealing with blindness, sickness, hunger and other issues: as people, not as problems. Drawing from a story about a marginalized, stigmatized man, Rev. Williams challenged the church to respond as Jesus responded and not His disciples. Where the disciples sought to solve a problem as to why the man suffered from blindness, Jesus offered healing and sight. So the church must offer healing and community to those afflicted with HIV/AIDS instead of excommunication and shunning.

After breakout sessions intended to explore different aspects of destigmatization from how pastors engage the issue to discussing sex and sexuality, keynote speaker Pernessa C. Seele spoke about the work she continues to do in eliminating the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Dr. Seele founded Balm in Gilead in 1989, a nonprofit designed to combat HIV/AIDS and other diseases for people disproportionately affected by them. Along with other black women involved with the Black Church Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS, she helped start National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day (NBHAAD). Initially, the Center for Disease Control’s wanted nothing to do with the black church and prayer with regards to HIV/AIDS, but Dr. Seele and these women persevered and NBHAAD resulted from their work.

Dr. Seele commented on the black church’s role in the oppression of those suffering with HIV/AIDS, due to oppression suffered by black people in the United States. She also noted that religious communities worldwide

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People of all ages and in all places suffer from HIV/AIDS but the United Nations plans to eradicate the disease by 2030. To learn more about what you or your congregation can do to help win the fight against HIV/AIDS, you can go to balingilead.org to begin engaging in the work of suffering with those who suffer from HIV/AIDS and creating an HIV/AIDS free world.

"Our Rights. Our Freedoms. Always."

By Jaime Gill

You see this phrase when you log on to the United Nations Website in honor of Human Rights Day. This raises the immediate question of whose rights and freedoms. The phrase sounds inclusive to everyone in the world, but really sounds like a campaign slogan for the represented who currently feel threatened at losing their rights and freedoms.

What you do to the least of these you also do to me.... (Matthew 25:40)

Both local and international news daily cover the topic of human rights, calling for “right” treatment of people and to allow them to live their lives with the romanticized ideal of “life liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Yet, with one click of the remote control to any news station, you will see a conglomerate of killings. Police officers who took an oath to serve and protect have decided that would only apply that oath to those that they consider worthy. Click! Black people execute other black men, women and children. Click! White American motorcycle gangs partake in a wild-west gun shoot out at a local diner. Click! Bombings in Paris. Click! Mass shootings occur in schools and businesses across the US Click! ISIS beheads Christians for their faith!

The killings don’t stop there. Presidential candidates verbally slay people of other races and cultures. Click! City officials murder the funding for organizations that support women and the marginalized. Click! We may be able to change the channel or even turn the television off, but the reality continues to play out every day in the lives of millions across the world.

December 10th marks Human Rights Day, a commemoration that began in 1948 as the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. According to the United Nations, the “[Universal Declaration of Human Rights is] a milestone document in the history of human rights, the most translated in the world; it proclaims “a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations” and sets out fundamental human rights universally protected by the world commu-
nity. This document contains themes found U.S. Constitution entitles people to enjoy “protected freedoms”. Yet, our world reflects a manifested irony to these very things.

So how do we move beyond the promise to the present? Philippians 2:1-30 states:

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus ...

We can celebrate Human Rights Day 2015 in the true reflection of its hope and intent to spread a message that we are only as strong as our weakest links. Where injustice reigns we must restore justice and where darkness reigns we must shed light. In the spirit of Human Rights Day, we must realize that we all bear God’s image and likeness and that hate someone or put them in bondage means putting a part of ourselves in bondage, for only in the freedom of all people am I then free. All equally participate in the problems of our world and we all equally can participate in the solutions.

We must create clear and applicable laws that deal with inequality and injustice on every level and then abide by them. We must exercise the rights of voting and freedom of speech to speak out for those silenced by death or the threat of persecution. Until we can create cities and governments that truly reflect all the people that it governs and holds them accountable to the title and responsibilities; until we use our faith as an instrument for action and not a place to hide; until we admit that things are not as though they should be; and until we all realize that we would not want to experience one day in the lives of those we know suffer different treatment because of their race, color, culture, or creed, then we celebrate Human Rights Day all wrong! Click.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

#SayHerName: Demand Officer Dante Servin be fired. BYP 100 is leading a march tomorrow, Dec. 9th, at Chicago Police Headquarters (35th and Michigan) at 7:00 PM.

Protest Dept. of Justice Complicity in Police Crimes. Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression is leading a mass rally on Thursday, Dec. 10, at 5:00 PM at the Federal Plaza (Dearborn and Adams), presenting an open letter and public complaints to U.S. Attorney General Roberta Lynch.

Beer and Carols. Local seminarians will be gathering at Jimmy’s Woodlawn Tap (1172 E 55th St.) Thursday, Dec. 10, at 8:00 PM to sing carols, drink beer, and celebrate surviving another semester!

1400 Events. Join the 1400 community for these two upcoming winter events! On Dec. 22 from 4:30 p.m.-10 p.m., members of the 1400 building will attend Zoo Lights in Lincoln Park and on Dec. 29th will participate in the Winter Wonderfest. Contact Lauren Robinson (laurenrobinson@go.mccormick.edu) for more info.

EXAMS. Exam week begins next week on Dec. 15, and will run until Dec. 19. JKM Library hours will run as normal until Friday, Dec. 18. The library will be closed Dec. 19-20. It will open again with shorter hours Dec. 21-23 and then will close from Dec. 24 through Jan. 3, 2016.

J-Term. J-Term will begin Jan. 4, 2016 and end on Jan. 22. There will be no class on M.L. King, Jr. Day, Jan. 18, 2016.
Special Message from the Herald Staff

Winter break will take place between Jan. 25-29.

If we don’t see you before Feb. 1, be sure to have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! Enjoy time away from books, close to people you care about, and doing whatever else you need to do to refuel before classes start again.

If you’re looking for a quiet space to write an exam, don’t forget to check out all of the study corrals on the 3rd floor of the JKM. And if all of those are full, you also have your ACTS card. Up on the north side, I’ve often done work at North Park’s Brandel library. Gregg Hunter swears by the Regenstein.

And don’t forget to get a jump up on your J-Term reading. You may have more than you think.