## WHAT THE CHURCH IS DOING TO COMBAT HIV/AIDS IN SOUTH AFRICA

By Molly Chambers

#### INTRODUCTION

The Catholic church is the largest private provider for HIV/AIDS medical care in the world. They have several programs set in place to eradicate the disease, especially in South Africa. Church leaders like Bishops and Priests work with their communities to educate, treat, and prevent the spread. This poster will help introduce some important organizations and educate people about other Catholic programs in South Africa.

#### WHO IS AFFECTED?

Today, Africa is home to over two thirds of the total infected population. Over 35 million African civilians have been infected and 15 million have already died from the disease. AIDS has lowered the African population's life expectancy by twenty years and is continuing to decline.

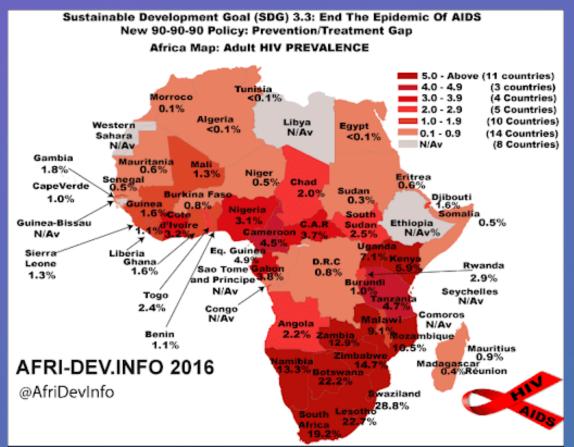


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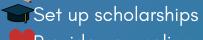
The image above shows which countries in Africa are most impacted by the epidemic. South Africa has a rate of 19.2 percent.

Five million of South Africa's 44 million inhabitants are infected with the virus. There are six hundred new cases every day. Another six hundred people die a day in South Africa as a result of the virus. It has tripled the number of deaths in 2003, most widely affecting those in the age range of fifteen to forty-five year olds. This age group is primarily made up of breadwinners, meaning that most of the working class is infected. Because of this, families are left with no steady income and the economy is failing. Families are unable to bury loved ones and bodies of the dead are overflowing the morgues. Children whose family members have become infected or died are left to turn to orphanages or begging on the streets. This means that they are unable to receive a formal education and often end up in gangs or resourcing to minor criminal activity. An estimated 260,000 children (age 0-14) are infected with the virus as well. Overall, the epidemic has impacted all groups of people in South Africa.

# BISHOPS' RESPONSES TO FAMILIES DEALING WITH HIV/AIDS

Provide clothes

Donate school supplies



Provide counseling

Give free HIV tests

Due to the spread of HIV/AIDS, many children have lost parents and family members to the pandemic. As a result, the number of children in orphanages is rising. There are currently and estimated number of 500,000 children living in orphanages. Bishops in South Africa have set up programs to help these children. By doing so, the Bishops hope to provide families and children with dignity and respect

### **CMMB**



The CMMB is the Catholic Medical Missions Board. They work to educate South Africans on ways to prevent AIDS. Their programs are designed to assists local healthcare providers in treating patients and delivering care to the community. They set up testing centers, have counseling for people struggling with AIDS, and provide voluntary circumcisions. The Catholic organization also works to prevent misconceptions from spreading such as having sex with a virgin would cure the disease. The CMMB has been working with many different African countries and began their programs in South Africa in 2009 after partnering with the Centers for Disease Control. Since then, they have been working to eradicate the epidemic completely.

### CRS

The CRS is the Catholic Relief Services. In South Africa, the CRS has served 7,618 people dealing with HIV/AIDS since 2000. Their programs focus on care and support for those living with the disease, both children and adults. They work to reduce the stigma of the disease and provide preventative education. They also provide voluntary testing and counseling.

#### WHY EDUCATION IS IMPORTANT

South Africans have many misconceptions that surround the disease, which not only stigmatize it further, but also result in spreading the disease. Some myths are believed to be true such as: one can be infected by being in the same room as an HIV positive person, sex with a virgin can cure the disease, and HIV is a death sentence with no way of surviving. These myths have promoted child rape and caused families to separate from each other. Catholic organizations push the importance of education to debunk these myths and remind people that their lives are not over after being infected. Education also helps to let people know the real ways to prevent the spread of the disease.

#### WHY THE CHURCH?

Many have argued that health care professionals should have more relevance in the fight against the disease instead of the church. However, the Church draws a wide range of supporters and followers who will be helpful in combating the disease. Also, a majority of South Africans are Catholic or affiliated with Christianity. Therefore, hope is an important aspect which the Church could bring to their lives. The church also passionately works with healthcare providers and organizations such as the CDC. By providing resources as well as hope, the church is able to connect with the community. Catholic social teaching is also an important part of treating people dealing with AIDS. Church members stress the importance of treating everyone with dignity and respect.