

ALABAMA: Churches Work to Promote HIV/AIDS Education

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To combat HIV/AIDS stigma in African-American churches, black pastors are educating their congregations using a new 61-page NAACP activity manual and an intervention program called TIPS: Taking It to the Pews. In Alabama, TIPS is operated through the Alabama Council on Substance Abuse under its Turning Point project, funded through the Minority AIDS Initiative. Turning Point came about because there was an increase of new HIV cases in Montgomery County and Alabama, said Kwatasian Hunt, its project manager. Eleven churches have presented the TIPS program to their congregations; Hunt said about one in three churches offered the programming accepts it. A target population is African-American women and their sexual partners. In 2009, black women accounted for 30 percent of new HIV infections among blacks - more than 15 times the rate for white women, according to CDC. Some of the behaviors associated with HIV/AIDS make it difficult to bring up such a taboo subject in Southern churches, said Marxavian Jones with Montgomery AIDS Outreach. The Rev. Benjamin Jones of St. James Missionary Baptist Church said his congregation has come to accept discussing HIV, although it was a little shock to some of the older members that their pastor would broach the subject. Pastor Tony Peoples of Love Center Church has a younger congregation, so he uses modern technology to convey AIDS education, including statistics in texts. As a result of TIPS, many of the congregants have had HIV tests. Many of them just didnt know HIV was that prevalent, Peoples said. Shavon Arline-Bradley, NAACPs director of health programs, helped oversee the manuals creation. People look at us as just civil rights, and what theyre missing is that health is one of the most pressing civil rights issues of our time, she said.

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