

NORTH CAROLINA: Churches Bring HIV/AIDS to the Forefront

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HIV/AIDS excessively affects African Americans, who comprise 44 percent of all new teen and adult HIV infections, with black men accounting for 70 percent of new infections in the United States in 2010, according to CDC. Many African-American churches in Durham, N.C., will observe the National Week of Prayer for the Healing of HIV/AIDS, March 31-0. Yvonne Dunlap is chairperson of the 16th annual Week of Prayer observance in Durham, where approximately 50 churches have worked together through the years to plan and host events. Churches taking the early lead include Union Baptist, St. Mark AME, Abiding Savior Lutheran, St. Titus Episcopal, Covenant Presbyterian, Holy Cross Catholic, and North East Baptist. Dunlap mentioned that HIV/AIDS can be a difficult subject to discuss in the African-American community because of the stigma attached to AIDS. She added that Durhams highest incidence of infection is among African-American men. Union Baptist Church Associate Pastor the Rev. Daphne Wiggins stated that the church has not always shown a positive attitude toward sexuality. She explains, We can at least encourage parishioners to take care of their bodies. Its OK to talk about sexuality. Wiggins emphasized that testing is encouraged, and that she wants to get information to people to take the fear from HIV/AIDS, adding, Being faith-based, we definitely encourage abstinence, but also if not, here are some ways to protect yourself. She stated that treatment does not have to be a death sentence. At each event, organizers will collect canned goods and accept donations to be given to local agencies HIV/AIDS programs. Wiggins stated that even though events are taking place at interracial or African-American congregations, everyone is welcome. Organizers encourage all people to become informed. Dunlap declares, You have to inspire people to provide care, compassion, and support to people living with the disease.

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