

Hidden Strengths

VOLUME V ISSUE IV

DECEMBER 2012

Speak OUT! A Personal Story

By TIA A. WATKINS
Director of Communications



Carolyn L. Massey:
A Mother, a Sister,
an HIV Aging Adult,
Health Advocate,
Author & Entrepreneur

Ms. Massey tell our faithful readers about yourself:

Nineteen years after receiving an HIV diagnosis I now educate others about HIV and AIDS as the Director of Positive IMPACT Ministries for the New Samaritan Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. I am also the Executive Director of Older Women Embracing Life, Inc. (OWEL Inc.) [pronounced "Oh-Well"] of Baltimore, Maryland. The organization helps to prepare women to live successfully [with HIV] by providing education, networking, support, and volunteer opportunities.



I also serve as Chairwoman of the Greater Baltimore Health Services Planning Council and the HIV Commissioner for the District of Columbia and Anne Arundel County Maryland. I speak publicly throughout the United States on the topics of HIV/AIDS including its intersect with African Americans health disparities, aging adults, communities of faith and women.

I have published works that are included in articles in the American HIV Prevention Journal, National Prevention Materials, and several White Papers. My focus is to build capacity within at-risk communities to recognize value in better health and wellness while strengthening networks of collaboration across local, regional, national and global communities with **one purpose -- to reduce the impact of HIV/AIDS.**

How old are you now and at what age did you contract the HIV virus?

I am currently 56 years old. I have known that I am HIV positive for 19 years.

When/how did you find out that you contracted the virus?

I learned of my status when visiting my physician for treatment of what I thought was a very bad cold.

Who was the 1st person that you told?

The first person that I told of my diagnosis was my son. In talking to my son I was involved in positive self-talk towards healing.

Were you surprised of the diagnosis?

Yes and No. When I was diagnosed I knew that HIV existed. However, because of the stigma around the disease I failed to learn as much as I should have about how it was transmitted. Nor did I identify my personal risk factors and act to reduce them.

What placed you at risk for contracting the virus?

Unprotected sex placed me at risk for contracting the virus.

Were you/are you still sexually active since being diagnosed?

When diagnosed I continued to be sexually active with the person who infected me. We were both HIV positive **not understanding that the virus could replicate a resistant strain to the medication.** We were playing Russian-Roulette by not having protected sex.

He was a former intravenous drug user with his own issues. He was not dealing with his diagnosis or medical needs. It was not until I was diagnosed that I discovered that he already knew that he was HIV positive. He was also emotionally and physically abusive throughout the relationship. The abuse was so extreme that I did not feel safe in asking him to use a condom.

Did you ever want/seek revenge on your partner?

Since I understand that **I cannot be forgiven without showing forgiveness** the answer to this question is "No".

Initially, what did you do when told that you were HIV positive?



When I learned that I had contracted the virus I chose to do nothing for almost a year because of self-stigma and fear.

How did you get over this self-stigma and fear?

My HIV diagnosis is one part of my life. Thus, like many other experiences I've sought to take the good from it and leave the rest. I am fortunate to have an understanding of how to manage my health as it relates to HIV/AIDS. I've learned to move forward...

What has been the biggest misconception/myths concerning contracting the virus?

HIV is a complicated disease. The HIV virus can lay dormant for years. **It can also mutate** (change into a different strain and become resistant to medication) if you are not adherent to your medical treatment regiment of taking your medications as prescribed, lowering stress levels, eating properly and getting exercise.

Misconceptions/myths concerning contracting the virus include that it is transmitted through kissing, eating off the same plate or using the same utensils of an HIV infected person. If HIV were treated as Cancer, Diabetes or Heart Disease we would tell individuals to eat healthy and exercise.

However, in some instances due to the Stigma HIV is the disease that people are still whispering about. **No more whispering.** The HIV conversation must continue to be held from the Church's Pulpit to the family's kitchen table.

Has medications affected you in an adverse way?

Like most people who are taking medication I experienced side effects many of which are temporary.

Are there any other side affects from the illness?

Pain and fatigue.

Continue on Page 2

Hidden Strengths

VOLUME V ISSUE IV

DECEMBER 2012

Speak OUT! A Personal Story cont. Page 2

By TIA A. WATKINS
Director of Communications

What encouragement can you give others with the illness?

HIV is a medical condition that can be managed. Maintaining a positive attitude and working to lessen stress can help you to remain healthy. Get correct information. Learn as much as possible about the disease and seek support. Since no cure exists it is important to understand the life-long nature of the illness.

What vital information can you give others age 50 and older concerning the virus?

The most important advise that I can offer to others age 50 years and older is to know their HIV status. For **if individuals are age 50 and older** and engaging in sexual intercourse outside of a confirmed HIV negative, monogamous relationship **they are at risk for contracting the HIV virus**. If they are positive it is wise to get into care immediately. While little research (especially among Black Women) has been done as it relates to the HIV and the aging process, over a long period of time **HIV can cause the body to mimic the signs of aging**. Thus, please see a Primary Care Physician and a HIV Specialist. Every individual needs to know for a fact...nay or yea if they are infected.

What one collaborative, unified message should the medical community, churches, HIV organizations and families provide to those infected?

Each of these communities has a role to play. Each community must **discourage Stigma and encourage truth**. **A Truth:** HIV is a medical condition that is impacted by behavior. The behaviors are associated with Psycho-Social factors influenced by the inability to cope with varied stressors, e.g., alcoholism, drug use, finances, lack of mental health support, trauma of Domestic Violence that can result in low-self-esteem and feeling powerless, sex... sex period to include one partner, two partners..., stable housing, unemployment, etc.

These factors ultimately impact decision-making skills. Consequently, individuals may then not get tested or use safer sex practices like abstaining from sex and other preventive measures. We must learn to engage in life on life's terms; asking ourselves **how is life working for you and be willing to make a change**.

19 years have passed since your diagnosis: Then and now what are the differences and similarities regarding the public's view of those infected with HIV/AIDS?

The HIV Stigma is very much alive. The Stigma the shame/guilt of the infected person and people judging them on how they contracted the virus only enforces the Stigma. The HIV Stigma must be done away with. Society must stop judging people based on "how" they were infected. **Those infected are human beings and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.**

Have you been treated differently in society since going public?

Being "treated differently" is a relative phrase. Since I have never attempted to hide my HIV status and I am at ease with my life **I am free to live without regard to how others view me**. I think it is important to share my HIV experience so that others might have a greater understanding of the disease and how to avoid stigmatizing others.

Was it the diagnosis or the maturing of years that has helped you to be at ease with your life?

Both. There are things in my life that were not right and I can't change them to make them right. There were people in my past who were not in my corner and there still are people that are not in my corner.

The only One I am concerned about being in my corner is Jesus the Christ. No one but Jesus has a Heaven or Hell to put me in. I will not waste time with the time I have left. I am not concerned with other's views. I am not concerned about those who are intrusive regarding my medical condition unless they have a cure.

How has your diagnosis changed your life?

My HIV diagnosis has indirectly empowered me to live with a deeper level of consciousness and to appreciate the relative nature of living. My HIV status is not the most important thing in my life – it has however helped me to reprioritize things in my life.

Ms. Massey tell our readers about your relationship with Jesus Christ.

I am so extremely glad that He and the Father sit high and look low...Amen



Now as a seasoned woman in the Lord what would you tell the younger you?

I'd tell my younger self not to try to carry the burdens of those around her. I would tell her that she is worthy of love and all the best that this world can offer. I'd remind myself that I am never alone.

I would tell my younger self that sometimes bad and evil things happen. However, it's not your fault. It does not mean that you are not a good girl. You are strong enough to make it and know that Jesus Christ really-really loves you. Finally, I'd tell that little girl that **she can reach for the stars**. They are not really that far away.

Any regrets?

I have a few regrets but none are worth lingering over. I take life one day at a time and fortunately that's all I have to live – just one day at a time.

Thank you for sharing. We conclude by asking what is your hidden strength?

My grandmother was a very loving woman who loved those who mistreated her. It is because of her that my hidden strength is a strong capacity to forgive.

To contact Carolyn L. Massey:
Education, Speaking Engagements,
Support or Training Needs

Carolyn L. Massey Executive Director
Older Women Embracing Life (OWEL)
410.601.4168 (o)
Web <http://www.owel.info/>
Email Owel_47@yahoo.com

Carolyn L. Massey Director
New Samaritan Baptist Church
POSITIVE IMPACT Ministry
240-821-4405 (c)

<http://newsamaritan.org/education-training.html>

Related Material:

<http://www.thebeaconnewspapers.com/washington-dc-edition/features/sex-drugs-and-hiv-after-50>

<http://www.thebody.com/content/art56479.html>

Director's Corner by Minister Donna R. Williams



GOD BLESSED ME WITH HIV

By Anna Fowlkes

"Count your blessings, count them one by one. Count your many blessings see what God has done". I loved this song as a child. The thought that I could count all the things that God had done for me and that every thing He did was a blessing was a message a little girl wanted to hear.

That song and "Blessed Assurance" were my favorites. As I've grown older I often look back and draw strength from my childhood memories. Today, I count my many blessings and am so thankful for all that God has done in my life. "This is my story. This is my song. I am praising my Savior all the day long."

I am a widow, mother, grandmother and a PK (preacher's kid). My father was a Bishop. My younger brother is a Bishop. My godmother was an Overseer to four Holiness Churches. I was named after my godmother and given to her when I was six months old. At the age of 12 I taught Sunday School to the younger children. I was president of the youth group of my church at the age of 13. When I was 15 I had a part-time job. I started college at the age of 17.

I educated my son about STD's and HIV but **I did not take my own advice.** I had unprotected sex with someone I had known for 40 years. We met when I was 13. We lived on the same block, attended the same high school and hung out with the same group of friends. We reconnected when he moved back home with his parents because he was very sick.

Because my husband and I purchased the home in which I grew up in we were neighbors again. As old friends do we sat and reminisced. I was looking for a church home and he invited me to go to church with him. That was our first date. Every Sunday we attended church together and went out to dinner.

Eventually we joined my brother's church. We were two old friends, supporting each other through rough times. I was widowed and still grieving and he was separated. We fell in love. We did not plan to be intimate, but it happened. We had unprotected sex. He was apologetic. I was grateful. I'd been widowed for over 5 years and that was a part of my life that I missed.

After all we were human and sex was natural. God forgave us of our transgression. However, I did not know that the man that I had just slept with had a secret and he didn't know how to share that secret. After all, his wife left him because she too had a secret. Two years later he was hospitalized with pneumonia.

I then realized that I needed to ask questions. I asked and he admitted that he was HIV positive. When I was 57 he was placed in hospice care and died. I thanked God everyday and every night that I was still healthy and uninfected. However, at age 59 I was diagnosed HIV positive. Consequently, I knew God had not brought me to this point to leave me.

I was not devastated, angry or despondent. I realized I would live and could live a healthy, viable life. Little did I realize that I was about to embark upon a journey that only God could have planned for me. God was preparing me to be used in ways I would never have imagined (Ephesians 3:20).

Today, I can honestly say, "God Blessed Me with HIV". **I am now 65 years old** and over the past six years I have become an HIV/AIDS Advocate and Spokesperson. When I was first diagnosed the only information about HIV I received was provided by medical personnel. However, **no one discussed the effects of HIV and aging.**

The first information I received about HIV and aging was when I participated in a minimester at the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy. **The impact of HIV on older adults** as well as age specific data was presented. This was followed by six personal stories from individuals who were over the age of 50 and HIV infected. The statistics made me aware that **HIV and aging was a growing problem.** I decided to share what I learned with other older adults.

That was the beginning of my advocacy. I can understand why so many people (particularly older adults) are vulnerable and more likely to become infected. I realize that many people are uneducated or undereducated about HIV and accept myths as truths. Knowledge is power. I aim to share all I have learned. I am outspoken because many infected people are not willing to speak out and/or be identified.

Many HIV infected have suffered from a stigma. Speaking out has strengthened me so that the stigma has no impact on my life. I have not changed as a result of my HIV status. But, my perspective on a lot of things has changed. I now eat healthier. My friends tell me I look better than I ever have.

I have gone places, met people and been afforded opportunities I could not have envisioned in my wildest dreams. As a result of my outreach I have been given feedback verifying that I have made a difference and have helped others. HIV has actually improved my life. I accept responsibility for my actions and I am not distrustful of others because of someone else's secret.

Until his death I remained friends with the person who infected me. I know God has blessed me with a giving and a forgiving nature. While trusting in God I have never said, "Why me?" Instead I have only said, "Why not me?" My faith today is stronger and my walk with God is closer. I know no one can come against me if God is for me.

I know God is for me because what the devil meant for bad God turned into my good. God has blessed me with HIV. My journey is still a work in progress. I pray everyday that God will allow me to be a blessing to someone. I truly want to be instrumental in preventing the spread of HIV.

I want to educate and encourage all sexually active people to get tested. What you don't know can harm, if not kill you. HIV is 100% preventable. **Get tested,** know your status and protect yourself.



I truly want to be instrumental in preventing the spread of HIV - since it is 100% preventable.

-Ms. Anna Fowlkes, HIV Advocate Guest Writer

Web: www.annaefowlkes.com

Email: annaefowlkes@aol.com

"You Cannot Save the Soul of a Corpse nor Minister Jesus to a Dead Person."

Renee Beaman
Executive Director
Beautiful Gate
Outreach Center
Wilmington, Delaware

<http://you.be/1u3122b0g>

<http://gate.org>

<http://www.bethelwilmington.org>

HIDDEN
STRENGTHS

Photograph of Ms. Anna Fowlkes made possible by Katja Heinemann and the Graying of AIDS Organization

www.grayingofaids.org



God **H**elps,
Enriches,
Accepts, **L**eads,
Envelops,
and
Delivers
His children.

"Life is short and it's up to you to make it sweet".

Where has this year gone? I don't know about you but it sure has been interesting for me and my family. I have to include my family because it was not just me going through it was "WE". January 28, 2012 started with the sudden death of my 61 year old sister-in-law and has ended with the sudden death of my second and last brother age 62, on October 20, 2012.

His death was just short of nine months after his wife's passing. Out of a family of seven children (7) we are now three (3). In spiritual reflection I can still praise The Lord for His mighty Hand of intervention. I have written in the past about my personal health issues, our family financial crisis and our struggles of being grandparents, raising grandchildren. So, so, so, many times it felt as if continuing to press on was a waste of my time, health and my life.

I felt that things could continue without me. I felt that my family would be better off and I preferred to live with JESUS anyway. However, God said "NO!" And here I still be!!! There is yet more work for me to do in this life. This quarter's topic "Why Choose Life" should cause all who are reading this issue to re-access **one's purpose for living. Don't walk through life aimlessly...playing dead while stile alive.** And don't except this projection from others on to your life. From people who are content with living in mediocrity...not even trying.

You know, the ones who don't want to succeed and don't want you succeed either. However, evaluate your personal interactions with The Lord and others during your daily lives. Determine whether or not you have been living or existing. Have you been a blessing or a blithe. Have you grown better or bitter as you have continue to grow older. Ms. Sadie Delaney (101 yrs old co-author of *The Delaney Sister's Doing it Our Way*) said "Life is short and it's up to you to make it sweet".

I believe Ms. Delaney made a good point. A better point could be added that life without Christ is more difficult as well as short. Only Jesus can help you to make it sweet. So why choose life? Because life chose you. St. John 15:16 "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you", St. John 15:19 says again "I have chosen you". Acts 9:15 calls you a chosen vessel and Acts 22:14 reminds us that the God of our father hath chosen thee.

God does nothing by happenstance. He was already aware of your past. HE knows your future. There is a plan for you. The Word of God (Jeremiah 29:11) states that God knows the plans that He has for you and it is good. We just have to trust Him. Be determined not to give up (Romans 8:38-39). I fully understand when times get hard they can get really hard. But know that it is then that the Lord is trusting you (**come here JOB!**) with what He gave you.

Face it some of the stuff that you have been through people would have said that you made it up (LIKE YOU WOULD REALLY PUT YOURSELF THROUGH THAT ON PURPOSE!!! PLEASE!). Why Choose Life because Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. He placed you here so that others would see that **Jesus is Real.** Jesus is the reason that you have a TEST-A-MOAN-E !!! In spite of all that you've gone through it is still worth it. Chose Life and live it to the fullest. Be the blessing you were created to be.

I did not like some of the stuff that happened to me. And I am sure that there will be more stuff I won't like. But the Lord promised that ALL things WILL work out for the/my good... Chose life!!! In the end you will be able to say that the struggle is over. The victory in Jesus is mine.

http://youtu.be/ll6qlDK_Glg

**-Minister Carrie Lucas
The Word of God Baptist Church
Washington, DC**

Communications Corner by Tia: What are you doing?

Why Choose Life?

Choosing life is making the decision to live OUT LOUD. Living gives you the opportunity to experience something greater than you ever imagined. For me living means being loved, creating, failing, loving, succeeding and realizing that your dreams can come true with hard work and dedication.

Living puts you in a space to help others. Living has a way of showing you how blessed you truly are. Some of those situations and circumstances that you have experienced or are currently going through may not be as tragic as you think.

Those are the times when you find yourself starring in the eyes of a homeless family whose mother's only interest is in finding work so she can provide shelter and food for her family. Living has a way of putting things into perspective. Living creates a unique awareness. It challenges your thoughts, reveals your truths, brightens your day and gives you true hope for the future.

Living provides you with the time needed to make mistakes, learn from them and to try it again. Living allows time to forgive. Living gives you wisdom to share with others. Living gives you the option to I choose to move forward despite the challenges. For me choosing life was no easy task.

It has meant long days, sleepless nights, crying babies while completing assignments, tears of my own, and a lot of hard work and sacrifice. Choosing life requires you to be in tuned with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit provides a road map to your future. I was in a situation to make the ultimate decision...choose life for my son or have an abortion. In the beginning I went back and forth about my decision.

I did not know whether or not I would have my child or make the next appointment to an abortion clinic. I made a list of negatives and positives. The negatives outweighed the positives. According to the list my son didn't have a chance. Under the positives I listed Jesus Christ's intervention in my life.

For me this outweighed the entire list of negatives. Without a shadow of a doubt I knew that God had everything to do with the creation of my son. For that reason alone I knew that making the ultimate decision to choose life for my little baby would be the best decision I could have made; not only for him but myself as well.

Choosing life allowed me to be in that space at that time; to make that decision to save my son's life. Sadly, because of fear and shame and what people would think I almost chose to kill my baby. However, I talked to Hidden Strengths leaders and others at the Pregnancy Clinic. **All counseled me to choose life--**to keep the baby. I now in turn counsel others who are considering aborting their babies.

If you're not truly living what are you doing? Living, **truly living** has changed my life. It has opened many doors to great and endless opportunities. It has given me much heartache and many joys. I choose life. The sky is the limit and I choose to live boldly and courageously. Choosing life was the best option for me.

**-Tia A. Watkins
Director of Communications
Hidden Strengths Support Ministry, Inc.**

<http://www.pregnancyclinic.org/>
"The First Choice for Women"

Community News: The AIDS Institute-HIV/AIDS Aging Awareness



The AIDS Institute (TAI) began as a grass roots community mobilization effort in the mid 1980s. In 1992, this advocacy network became incorporated as a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization.

Over the years, The AIDS Institute has expanded its vision to become a leading national nonprofit AIDS agency with offices in Tampa, Florida and Washington, DC. Affiliated with the Division of Infectious Diseases and International Medicine at the University of South Florida College of Medicine.



The AIDS Institute remains focused on HIV/AIDS while incorporating work on related healthcare issues, including Hepatitis. September 18, 2012 marked the AIDS Institute's 5th Annual Observance of National HIV/AIDS and Aging Awareness Day (NHAAAD).

"Aging is a part of life: HIV doesn't have to be" was this year's theme and the campaign continues to emphasize the increased need for prevention, research, and data targeting the aging population, medical understanding of the aging process and its impact on HIV/AIDS. In 2009, 1 in 6 new diagnoses in the United States were people age 50 and older. By 2015, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that nearly 50% of Americans with HIV will be age 50 and older.

In an effort to align with the goals of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy, NHAAAD focused on the following:

1) People living with HIV/AIDS who are aging with the disease or already over 50 at the time of their initial diagnosis, 2) Increasing the use of protection from HIV infection, especially among the baby boomer population, and 3) The increasing number of grandparents becoming the primary guardians for children who have lost their parent(s) to HIV/AIDS.

The Annual observance provides an opportunity to focus on the many issues facing the aging population with regards to HIV prevention, testing, care and treatment. This year over 20 events were registered and over 151 media posts highlighted TAI's NHAAAD press release. In addition, the National HIV/AIDS and Aging Awareness Day steering committee provided significant updates to NHAAAD-related materials, including the NHAAAD Event Registration, Evaluation, Resources and Tool Kit.



The AIDS Institute also held the NHAAAD national webinar covering a call to action for HIV awareness, education and prevention for older adults, enhanced collaborations to address HIV among older adults and emphasized the need for increased research on older adults living with HIV. There were over 75 total attendees that participated during the webinar.

The AIDS Institute developed a strategic partnership with the James A Haley Veteran's hospital in Tampa, Florida and collaboratively hosted an HIV/AIDS Awareness Event on September 28, 2012. Similar events are being planned for future HIV/AIDS awareness efforts.



Ways to get involved in National HIV/AIDS and Aging Awareness efforts:

@AIDSandAGING is our official Twitter Hash-tag for the National HIV/AIDS Awareness and Aging Day. **Please RETWEET! Like Us** on Facebook <http://on.fb.me/pjLwzl>.

Also, download NHAAAD Tools (14 Attachments). Share with your neighbors, colleagues, and friends. The Tools Promote: HIV testing among older Adults. Provide HIV prevention and education messages and resources that link to care for older Adults living with HIV.

The Tool also helps to conduct local community awareness and education events in settings where older Adults live or meet (e.g., nursing homes, assisted living facilities, community centers, and faith communities). To download NHAAAD-related materials, feel free to visit our website at <http://www.NHAAAD.org>.

-Michelle Scavnicky, MS

Director of Education &
Capacity Building Assistance Programs
Tampa, Florida

Web: <http://www.theaidsinstitute.org/>

Email: mscavnickytai@aol.com
813-258-5929 ext. 4 (o)

A Christian's Response to HIV/AIDS

<http://www.hivaidsinitiative.com/>

HIV and AIDS Confront Us: With sexuality, disease, discrimination and death--issues we may fear and try to avoid.

When you Pray Ask Yourself Two Questions: How would Jesus respond to a person with HIV/AIDS? How would I want others to respond to me if I had HIV/AIDS?

Answer Jesus' Call!: Reaching out and including people with HIV/AIDS and their families, friends and caregivers in your church's ministry is a way for each of us to grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Build Peace and Social Justice: Jesus' life proclaimed that human rights, dignity and peace come from God--we are stewards of these gifts (Matthew 5:1-12, Mark 10:17-25, Luke 4:18-19 and John 8:1-11).

Excerpts From an AIDS Administration Baltimore MD Pamphlet

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ryan_White

Commentary: The Graying of AIDS



The HIV Disease and AIDS, which is the syndrome of the disease condition caused by an infection with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus has been a major medical and public health challenge for the past three decades.

While HIV positive people are now living much longer and much better lives than in the earlier years of the epidemic there is still no cure and transmission of the virus persists. The good news that treatment has extended the length and quality of life for people living with the virus also means that the disease is complicated by many of the normal processes of aging as well as particular impacts of HIV on aging.

There are also other disease conditions that may occur simultaneously with the HIV infection. The number of older Americans newly diagnosed with HIV/AIDS is steadily increasing. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) surveillance report from February 2011, there are approximately 30% of people currently living with HIV/AIDS age 50 or older in the United States. Trends suggest that this proportion will increase steadily to more than 50% by 2015.

Older adults are not routinely offered HIV testing because they, nor their care providers see them as at risk. Additionally, prevention messages are not targeted to the aging population. It must be recognized that older individuals may often be divorced or

widowed and are back on the dating scene at a time when the dating culture, as they knew it has changed. Social media such as **Craigslist, Facebook and Twitter are not limited to the young.**

Older adults also may use these sites as ways to develop new relationships. **There is an urgent need to raise the awareness around the issue of HIV prevention and testing for older adults** who are often diagnosed late in the disease. Health care providers should screen older patients at each visit for high-risk behavior or evidence of sexually-transmitted infections, and offer HIV testing and prevention messages tailored to the individual.

The faith community can serve a crucial role in combating HIV infection. We have a long history of being at the forefront of promoting healthy lifestyles with diseases such as Diabetes and Hypertension which disproportionately impacts older adults. Today, in the face of this growing epidemic, a church's Health Ministry can provide opportunities to raise the awareness by offering appropriate prevention education.

The faith community can no longer ethically be silent regarding healthy relationships, mental health or sexuality. As a nurse and clergy member I have found wonderful opportunities to provide education and spiritual support to those who want to eradicate the stigma surrounding HIV. I encourage testing and embrace those living with the challenges of HIV/AIDS with compassion. Seven years ago I began searching for a support group for my older female patients living with HIV. I had no success.

In 2005 I was able to pull together a small group of HIV positive women and one affected woman. All of whom wanted to give support to one another as well as to other women and families impacted by the disease. We called the group Older Women Embracing Life (OWEL), pronounced "Oh-well". Older Women Embracing Life meets on a monthly basis.

Together, we provide a safe haven for women to share their unique 'older age' issues. We now offer a yearly conference for women infected with or affected by HIV/AIDS along with their care providers. OWEL actively participates in testing campaigns and has its own speaker's bureau. Our presence is being felt in the community and increasingly recognized beyond our local area.

What I have shared with you is just one of the ways that a difference can be made in tackling this epidemic. There is still much work that must be done in order to improve education around the stigma that shrouds HIV, as well as empowering individuals to take responsibility for stopping the spread of this disease.

-Ms. Dorcas Baker RN, BSN, ACRN
Johns Hopkins Local Performance Site
PA/MidAtlantic AIDS Education
& Training Center
1503 E. Jefferson Street Room 104
Baltimore, Maryland 21231
Web: <http://www.pamaaetc.org/lpsjho.htm>
Email: dbaker4@jhmi.edu
Phone: 443-287-4779
Fax: 410-502-6138

A Witness is Needed



Every 35 minutes a woman tests positive for HIV in the United States. More and more women have been infected with HIV since it was first reported in the early 1980s and in 1991 when I was diagnosed. Today, about 1 in 4 Americans living with HIV are women. I urge women to get tested.

Prior to being diagnosed in 1991 HIV/AIDS was foreign to me. However, I quickly became aware of the reality that now I not only had to deal with the disease but I had to be concerned with the impact it would have on my life and emotions. Living with HIV brought new and unexpected challenges as well as an awareness of the stigma and discrimination associated with the disease.

For approximately ten years I lived in secrecy. I made decisions concerning my medical care in isolation. Fear also kept me in bondage because of the shame and guilt that I associated with HIV. I decided never to disclose my status and to take this secret to my grave. I did not expect to live past 48. Initially, HIV was a top priority. To remain healthy I decided to **manage the disease and not allow the disease to manage me.**

To be spiritually healthy I eventually discovered the necessity of disclosing my status. The burden of secrecy had become larger than life and an obstacle that was actually making me sicker. It became apparent that the act of disclosing meant freedom to live a life of hope and unlimited possibilities for the future.

I began to change my thinking about the disease. I viewed HIV simply as a health challenge to be managed rather than obsess over it. As a result my life is now full and productive. I no longer live as its victim. I use to wonder how the disease would affect my life at the age of 70, 80, or even over 90.

I am now 69 years old. I face those ailments that come with aging. It has not yet been determined if HIV accelerates the aging process or if the aging process makes HIV symptoms worse. Whatever the reason I am more **committed more than ever to living long and living well.** Being HIV+ over the past 21 years has of course changed the course of my life.

However, I am not only alive but I continue to thrive. Having the courage to disclose my status, becoming willing to change my thinking, being a HIV Activist and how **I have chosen to live my life** are all key elements. I take advantage of opportunities to provide workshops and presentations that are aimed at HIV Education and Prevention. As a bonus along the way I've met some phenomenal women!

I am a core member and former Executive Director of Older Women Embracing Life (OWEL). OWEL is a structured network of senior women and organizations that provide support for women and their families affected by HIV/AIDS. Our mission is to plan and develop programs aimed at revitalizing the spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical state of these women and their families.

Thriving with AIDS means that **I must walk in faith.** In 1996 I developed a personal relationship with Jesus Christ after a desperate search to find Him. I needed a God of MY understanding. I visited many churches before finding a church home. However, what I discovered and know today is that it has been God all along who has carried and guided me. I had to go within to find Him.

Thank God for research and medications—these things are certainly necessary. However, it is the trust and faith in Jesus Christ that allows me to heal.

-Ms. Marilyn N. Burnett
Board Member
Older Women Embracing Life, (OWEL)
7219 Park Heights Avenue Suite 206
Baltimore, Maryland 21208
Web: <http://www.owel.info/>
410.585.1354 Office
443.799.6005 Cell



Pastor Shirley J. Jones
Rehoboth Family
Life Center
Upper Marlboro, MD

Unleavened Bread

Why Choose Life?

Why choose life? *Jesus tells us in John 10:10 that the thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*

Jesus was scorned, ridiculed, beaten, spat on and crucified. In all of this He denied defending Himself in everything so that we could live. Why choose life? How can we not choose life with such a great price that has been paid?

Not choosing life would say to Jesus Christ that His sacrifice was for naught. Let us not do Him such a disservice. Let us thank Him for life and live it according to the precepts of God. Before salvation we were working, raising children, marrying and being someone's friend.

Our life was being led by the enemy of our soul. We were actually the walking dead; as Zombies living in sin and appeasing our flesh. However, because of Jesus Christ we now have life in Him and have eternal life. Why choose life?

How can we not since we now have the opportunity to live forevermore? The Word of God tells us in *Psalm 103:3-4 that who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases. Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies.*

God has forgiven us of all the stuff that we have done against the Precepts of God while walking with the enemy. Why choose life? How can we not? We have been forgiven AND been given so much.

We are Called to be the Light of the World, Salt of the Earth and an Ambassador of Almighty God. Why choose life? We can only be instruments in the Hands of God when we choose life. We can only give what we have. Why choose life? When we live, someone else can live and move in purpose and destiny.

Everyday that we wake up is a Gift from God to share with Him, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. We get a chance to filter our thoughts, actions and words through the leading of the Triune God. We get behind them and go through our day with victory.

Then at the end of the day we can thank them for hanging out with us. Why choose life? Life is a Gift from God; a Glorious gift. To God be the Glory for Life! Let us choose life!

<http://youtu.be/IAylzprgzIQ>

Give Me Strength: MISHANDLED



Although decades older this is the face of a trusting child in the hands of a molester.

*"While IN the abuse I begged to die!
While being physically, sexually and mentally tortured
I cried out for MERCY!"*

Jesus CHOSE Me!

I wanted this cruel joke to end and death seemed the only option. They wouldn't listen when I said NO. No one paid attention to the disturbing signs that something just wasn't right. EVERY day I had to awaken to the harsh fact that it could happen again and thought that the God everyone spoke of didn't even love me enough to let me die.

Miraculously I grew stronger. Somehow life moved on and my abusers where removed from my life. Somehow I continued to live. Ironically, *I lived through death*. Let me explain. I didn't believe in Jesus Christ because of all the horrific things that continued to happen to me. You see, it was His representatives that were in my life.

They didn't deem it necessary to share Him with me. I tried to make my own way through the mess others caused in my life. They piled it on heavy. Depressed, psychotic and suicidal thoughts sometimes overtook me. Dying should have been easy.

LIVING was the hard part. Nothing seemed to work. No matter how much I begged for death it wouldn't come. I overindulged in promiscuity, drugs, alcohol, and work. I was desperately trying to escape from the hellish life I was living.

My nightmares tortured me in my awakened hours. I remember saying: "In my next life I would be so & so. They seemed to have it easier." Little did I know that He had my next life already PLANNED for me. For *when I chose death Jesus chose me.*

I LIVED through death. I did get my second chance all with one decision... Salvation. At 35; right on the brink of 36 I am so grateful for Jesus acknowledging me even when I didn't acknowledge Him.

He heard my cries. He seemingly answered them in His own way. Although at the time of being abused I would have opted for an immediate healing and rescuing. Looking back I now see Jesus was ALWAYS there.

I NOW see Jesus had plans for me that were bigger than the mess. He comforted me in my disease and walked with me through those torturous moments, allowing me to be sensitive to my surroundings. Not denying the pain experienced while I was in it.

However, I can't deny the compassion for others that I've developed. Looking at my life now it is all about relating to women who are currently or have dealt with similar issues. Jesus is now using me as a bridge to Him for other hurting women that believe life is hopeless.



Shirelle "Diamond" Hogans
<http://www.diamonds-world.org/>

Sexual Assault Center: Prince George's Hospital, 3001 Hospital Drive, Cheverly, MD 20785, 301-618-3154 Provides services to child and adult sexual assault victims, including medical evaluation, evidence collection, and on-going group, individual, and family counseling. Medical attention is available 24 hours. Provides court evidence, as well as community education and prevention.

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) * 1.800.656.HOPE * Get Online HELP NOW at <http://www.rainn.org/>

<http://youtu.be/ND4QU6kTjL4>

Echoes of a Man



Live and Live Some More!

After 32 years I've learned a lot. But, I've learned one thing for certain tomorrow is not promised. Every morning that we awake the first thing we should do is to thank God for another day of living. The second thing is to take a good look around and recognize that God has seen fit for you to see and have all the things that you are looking at right now. From the clothes on your back, to the roof over your head God has provided all of this. Some might say, "God provided what? I work every day for the things that I have."

In some ways sure that's true. But if you had not awakened this morning with breath in your nostrils and the ability to use your right mind, HOW exactly would you have been able to get up and go to work, to purchase the things that you have....HOW!!!! If you didn't have the life that you have now how would you do anything? Would you even be a relevant thought in someone else's mind? No, because simply put you would not be here.

My father preached this weekend on "We are not our Own". His sermon came from 1st Corinthians 6:19-20; Ecclesiastes 12:1; and Ephesians 2:8-22. The Apostle Paul pinned the words in Ephesians, "For by Grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. Not of works, that no MAN should glory. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them...." Simply, God created us in HIS likeness for HIS glory.

We are not here for ourselves. We are not blessed with this life to live it the way we want...any type of way. Our lives have been given to us; a life that was due to the sacrifice of ONE MAN; Jesus the Christ (Fully Divine, Fully Man). Because of HIS sacrifice we have been given life; given the best Gift which includes the one and only Living God. The likeness of whom we were created in. My father says time and time again if you want to get to know God, you have to know HIS Word. Get into HIS Word (meaning

When I took my spiritual walk with Maryland Emmaus it was one of the most amazing weekends of my life. The walk was very spiritually impacting. It just so happened that the walk was around the same time of the movie release of The Passion of The Christ. When I got home from the walk my wife and I decided to go and see the movie. Never had I realized what Jesus truly endured...for US! The pain He was subjected to. The hate, the lies....and yet....we say that this is our life.

No, this is not your life! You were bought--**purchased with the price of the Blood of Jesus the Christ**. God's only Begotten Son. So my questions to you: Why not choose to live? Why not choose to live righteously? Why not choose to live this life you were blessed with? Why not choose to recognize that your living came at the sacrifice of One? One who didn't give a second thought to giving His life for wretches like you and I.

I want to make sure that I end my article by giving my readers a reference scripture...one in particular, Deuteronomy 30:19, "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore CHOOSE LIFE, that both thou and thy seed may live."

...as my father always says the simplicity of God's Word.

Let us pray: *Father God we thank you, we thank you for your sacrifice Lord, we thank you for the life that you have blessed us with even after sacrificing something so precious, the life of your only begotten Son, we thank you for doing that in spite of our wicked ways Lord, and we bless Your Name, simply for being God and God alone. We ask that you continue to be with us that we may continue to read and "Live out" your Word and carry out your will and your ways Lord. We thank you, and we bless your Holy Name.....In the Name of your precious Son, Jesus Christ, we pray....AMEN!!!*

**-Colin A. Dew
Deacon-in-Training
Victory Temple Missionary
Baptist Church
Alexandria, VA**

Have we forgotten
about pleading the
Blood of Jesus the Christ?

Do we remember how?

<http://youtu.be/fmSHQu6C0tc>

Blood Related Scriptures:

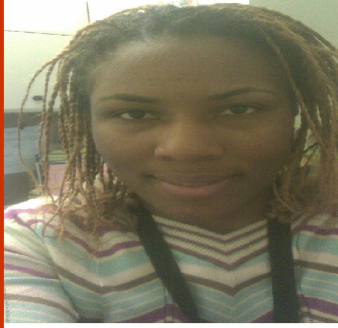
Leviticus 17:11 For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood *that* makes atonement for the soul.

Mathew 26: 28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

Ephesians 1:7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

Ephesians 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Revelations 12:11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.



Courage

By Ms. Tyrese Davis

Poet Laureate

Hidden Strengths Support Ministry, Inc.

Sitting. Vinyl seat with foam cushioning never felt so, uncomfortable as the rays from the landscape window lay upon my skin. Skin I could not escape. Had my mind not been trapped in this moment, I would have been reminded of blue waters, taupe sand, green patches and tongues announcing different from my origination. A multitude of tears ran down my face, but my one track mind was stuck racing. HIV/AIDS *Hidden* in me, *Infested* in me, *Vocal* in me was this festering alien that I did not choose and maybe had not chose me. Did destiny choose it and I? Was this really in my plan? Was this even real? I am left to pay a fortune without a bank to borrow from.

I can't breathe.

I don't know how I got here in this tunnel, in this park, in this place, to this point, but I am here. I am not afraid because I am afraid. I am not afraid because I am disgusted. Both fears level at a balance. Not sure which evil would win on today but today it will be done. I close my eyes and see the bottomless pit I am in, embracing the contrast of texture and temperature impressing upon my auditoria source; tasting of taint metal and end and no resort, of no redemption, no resuscitation.

BOOM

And from out of nowhere it happens; out of nowhere HIV comes lunging at me, un-evening the score. Courage came from somewhere out of me. As common as the fall of the fall leaves in this season, I cannot hear my tears or my own voice. Every plan has a deviation: I know I have to sort out my destiny. I know that I have chosen life. I don't know what is to come; somehow I have chosen to overcome. I'll have to take a day at a time.

Little white Abortion pill with no eyes staring at me. Stop looking at me! Medicine cures but I never liked the taste too much. I mean Advil taste like cola so I never minded it. But I never liked all those side effects either that seem to come fixed to everything these days.

I am a mother. I am in a generation of parental perversion; dysfunction. 2/3's of the time I am a superhero fighting to provide the best education, environment and elements of nurture I possibly can in this world of blind assimilation where minds are bruised, poisoned and annihilated by choice daily.

I fight for one cause as I have been accustomed to doing for 5 years now. But there seems to be that my road isn't getting smoother; as I am foreseeing a larger bump before me. So abrupt it interrupts my course, my sane thinking. Although it was I who was corrupt in my agreeance and my yes-ing that caused this blessing to be. It is being. It is a being.

Seeing past what I see, I chose not the stirrups, not the medicine that resists growth, not to cause my body unnatural distress.

Courage sounds sweet but tastes bitter.

HIV...AIDS...I choose life.

Older Women Embracing Life

*Healing spiritually,
emotionally, and physically*

Meetings

Date: The first Wednesday of every month

Time: 11:00 AM — 1:00 PM

Location: Nebo Christian Ministries
240 N. Franklintown Road
Baltimore, Maryland 21223

For more information, contact Robbin Alexander: (410) 601.4168 or email us at OWEL_47@yahoo.com

Mailings

Older Women Embracing Life (OWEL)
7219 Park Heights Avenue
Suite 206
Baltimore, Maryland 21206
P: 410.601.4168
F: 410-502-6138
E: OWEL_47@yahoo.com

Older Women Embracing Life (OWEL)
7219 Park Heights Avenue
Suite 206
Baltimore, Maryland 21208

Who We Are

OWEL stands for **Older Women Embracing Life**. We are a group of senior women – most of us living with HIV, all of us affected by HIV – who come



together every month to support one another and to talk about our experiences with HIV/AIDS and related issues. In our safe, warm, confidential and welcoming environment, women share their stories if they choose and learn from those who have been living long and well with HIV/AIDS. We also regularly invite speakers who share their knowledge about topics of interest to OWEL members. We share lunch and learning, hope and joy!

OWEL'S Vision

Our vision is to create a community of women who are living full, productive



and happy lives, despite the challenge of HIV/AIDS. To bring that vision into reality, our mission is to design and implement projects and programs that will revitalize the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical health of the women of OWEL and to foster the development of deep and meaningful connections — connections with one another, with HIV service agencies, and with health care providers — connections that will enhance women's confidence in proactive participation in their own care and well-being.

How We Work Toward Our Vision

OWEL members are educators, advocates, mentors and friends.

- OWEL members provide one-on-one mentoring and support to women struggling with the realities of a diagnosis of HIV/AIDS.
- OWEL members participate in health fairs, workshops, conferences and community events at which HIV testing is offered and resources shared to fortify our communities' response to the HIV pandemic.
- OWEL members present their own life stories and the lessons learned to increase HIV awareness and strengthen HIV prevention efforts.

Please join us!



**“Then I realized, I’m not just kissing a frog...
I’m kissing every frog he’s ever kissed.”**

HOW AIDS CAN BE SPREAD

Peter and Paula meet and decide they want to have sex.



Peter



Paula

Paula has heard of AIDS, but thinks Peter is a good-looking guy and seems nice. He couldn't be infected with any sexually transmitted diseases, she thinks. He certainly *looks* healthy.

But Paula isn't looking at the big picture. She is not considering that in the past Peter may have slept with someone who had been exposed to infection.

To help you understand, consider this:

Peter's former girlfriend is Diane. Peter and Diane had sex. Diane had sex with two guys, Chuck and Jon, before she had sex with Peter.

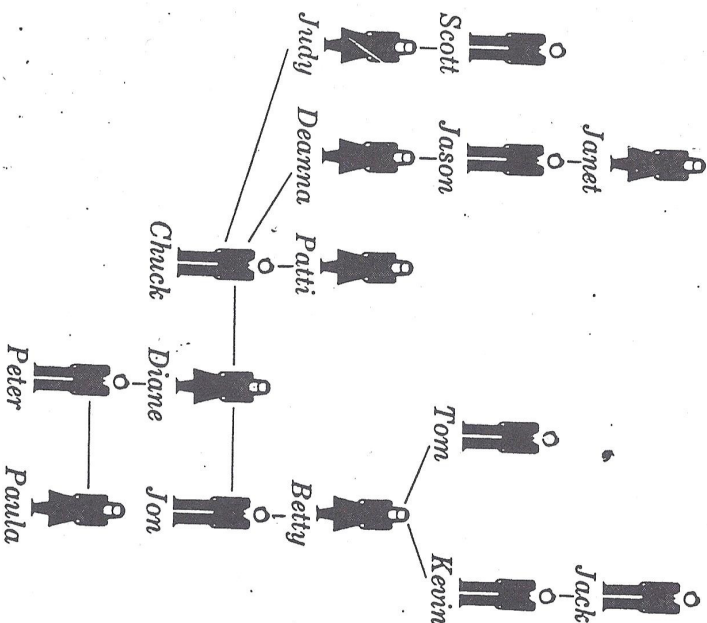
Chuck's three partners before Diane were Patti, Deanna, and Judy. Jon's old girlfriend was Betty.

Deanna had had sex with one person, Jason, before Chuck. Jason's former partner had been Janet.

Judy's first partner was Scott.

Betty had two previous sexual relationships, with Tom and Kevin, who was bisexual and involved with Jack.

So when Paula says she is safe with Peter, she is for-



getting about the other 13 people in the picture. If any one of those people is infected, the virus could have been spread. For instance, Scott could be infected and not know it. So remember: When you sleep with someone, in a way you are having sex with all his or her previous partners.

Hidden Strengths Support Ministry, Inc.

Ministry sessions are held every 3rd Friday of each month
7:30 p.m. promptly

Location: S.G. Spottswood A.M.E. Zion Church
Rev. Dr. Paul Hoggard, Pastor
419 Hill Road
Landover, Maryland 20785
Voice: 202.372.7716

Email: hssministryinc@aol.com
Website: www.hiddenstrengthsministry.org
Twitter: <http://twitter.com/hiddenstrengths>

Prayer requests and Correspondence:
Hidden Strengths Support Ministry, Inc.
P.O. Box 2052, Bowie MD 20718-2052

To Contribute to Hidden Strengths
Donations are Tax Deductible.
Please Forward your contributions to:
Hidden Strengths Support Ministry, Inc.
P.O. Box 2052, Bowie MD 20718-2052

Hidden Strengths is seeking individuals to submit Testimony to the awesomeness of God. Please forward your testimony and contact information to: Hidden Strengths, PO Box 2052, Bowie MD 20718. **You may be selected and featured in our A Witness is Needed** Column (300-325 words max.). Hidden Strengths reserves the right to edit for clarity and space. No fee paid.

Ministry News and Information

S.G. Spottswood A.M.E Zion Church

Rev. Dr. Paul Hoggard, Pastor
9:00 am Sunday School
10:00 am Sunday Morning Worship Service
7:30 pm Wednesday Night Bible Study
419 Hill Road, Landover MD 20785
(301) 336.9315

The Spirit of Truth Ministries

Elder Mary A. Mazon-Umaru, Pastor
10:30 am Sunday School
11:00 am Sunday Morning Worship Service
6516 #C Central Avenue, Capital Heights, MD 20743
(240) 381.0800
<http://www.thespiritoftruthministries-capitolheightsmd.com/>

Rehoboth Family Life Center

Elder Shirley Jones, Pastor
10:00 am Sunday Morning Worship
17900 Queen Anne Road
Upper Marlboro, MD 20774
(443) 306-1520
<http://www.rehobothflc.org/>
<http://www.shirleyjones.blogspot.com/>

Distinguished Musical Volunteers of Tomorrow Inc.

Ms. Chaleka Price, Director
P.O Box 31141
Capitol Heights, MD 20731
(240) 326-3840
<http://www.dmvot.org/>



CHOOSE LIFE: YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:1-3).

Beloved, you can be born anything or anyone. Born into any given situation to any given people. But, Jesus said that you must be born again. Only Jesus the Christ gives mankind the opportunity to by-pass our mother's womb and experience the birth process once again.

http://youtu.be/fd_FtPHliw

Receive the Prayer of Salvation:

Lord Jesus, forgive me of all of my sins. I believe you died on the Cross for me. I repent of my sins and I accept you as my personal Savior and Lord. I open the door of my heart and invite You to come in. Cleanse me of all unrighteousness. I turn my back on sin and my past. I want to follow you as my Savior and Lord for the rest of my life. In Jesus' Name...Amen.

Also, Hidden Strengths invites you to re-dedicate your life to God. Confess your sins before God and your faults before man; turn away from your misguided ways and embrace the loving arms of your Savior and Lord Jesus the Messiah.

Photo: By Tia A. Watkins and the Bowie/Crofton/Severna Park Maryland Pregnancy Clinic

CHOOSE LIFE: FLEE FORNICATION

Beloved, know your HIV/AIDS status...get tested. For what you don't know can and will kill you. We further ask that our readers protect themselves against HIV/AIDS and all other sexually transmitted diseases by abstaining from sex outside of the Covenant of Marriage. Although, sexual contact is not the only form of HIV transmission, prior to entering into marital relations if each spouse is not virginal get tested...for the devil comes but to kill, steal and destroy your hope for the future by any means necessary.

But Jesus said that I have come that you may have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10). Having life more abundantly means living life while walking in wholeness (content, not wanting for anything) in every area of your life. Thus, do not enter into a sexual relationship without knowing your partner's HIV status or not being in a Marital relationship. For not only is your life at stake but the lives and welfare of any children conceived out of wedlock.

Pregnancy without a supportive and loving husband is neither cute nor glamorous. It's hard labor for twenty-one years with children living in homes with one parent and one income. Where one parent, in some cases must live with relatives or work 2-3 jobs in order to feed their children and provide a roof over their heads because the absentee parent refuses to do what is right in the eyes of God and the society at large.

Think about it this way...think about it: Genesis 2:7 states "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." God made (formed) and created (breathed the breathe of life...His Spirit) Man. **"Making" humans is the ONLY JOB that was formally God's that He has entrusted to us...to make other humans.** God told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28). Consequently, you can not reverse what God has spoken.

God gives us free will. And I personally believe that individuals have the right to utilize birth control. However, Man's invention and opinion can/will never supersede the Voice of God. Thus, births will continue (because God spoke it) even with the use of various Birth Control Methods available. As a result, with free-will comes responsibility. **Sex is serious.** For every time one engages in sexual activity you are saying to God, yourself, your sexual partner and the community that you-**both male and female**-have accepted God's job and want to be fruitful and multiply....make a baby. Don't let your flesh fool you because that is exactly what you are saying/doing every time you have sex whether you are aware of it or not; attempting to make another human being. Thus, we ask that you abstain from sex outside of the Covenant of Marriage.

-Minister Donna R. Williams