

PROPOSED OVERTURE COMING FROM THE ASHLAND PRESBYTERIAN SESSION

The Presbytery of Baltimore overtures the 225th General Assembly to change the use of the term “AIDS” to “HIV” in all awareness days recognized on the Presbyterian Planning Calendar. This change would be made only on national awareness days, not international.

Rationale:

The continued use of the term “AIDS” is problematic for several reasons. First, it underlines a continuing misunderstanding of the issue. HIV is the virus. AIDS is the result of the virus causing severe damage to the immune system. Second, due to improvements in medical treatment, complications due to HIV are far more prevalent than AIDS itself. Language should be adjusted to reflect the current realities of the disease. Finally, the term “AIDS” continues to be both misunderstood and stigmatizing. Medical professionals have favored using the term “Stage 3 HIV” over “AIDS” in current work largely due to the stigma associated with the latter term (www.nih.hiv.gov)

The continuing stigmatization of HIV is made even more problematic by who is suffering from the virus. Black and Latinx members of the LGBTQ community are disproportionately being affected by the disease. HIV remains at epidemic levels in many black and brown communities throughout the nation because they are disproportionately affected by poverty (www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/overview/data-and-trends/statistics). The PC(USA) should be working to lift the veil of misinformation and working to improve the social determinants of health for those at the margins.

Despite the dire circumstances that exist where the virus spreads, using the term HIV should serve as a reminder that the virus is no longer the death sentence it once was. People are living and thriving with HIV and are actively contributing to their churches and their communities. This change honors their perseverance and integrity. Additionally, the Church should adopt the stance of using “people first language” whenever it is appropriate, to focus on the people rather than just being aware of it. For example, when referring to awareness days, we would say “People Living With HIV (PLWH) Day” rather than “HIV Awareness Day.”

The Presbyterian AIDS Network (PAN) recently changed its name to the Presbyterian HIV Network (PHIVN). This was done with the above factors in mind. We believe that all official communication from the PC(USA) should replace “AIDS” with “HIV” and that the Church continues to educate itself on this ongoing epidemic. The PC(USA) should position itself to be an active part of the [ending the epidemic plan](#) set out by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Approved by Ashland Presbyterian Church September 14, 2021