

## **Fifth Theological Consultation of Member Churches of the Bremen Mission**

from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> April 2002 in Agome-Tomegbe, Togo

Participants of the

Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Togo, EEPT  
Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana, E. P. Church, Ghana  
Bremen Protestant Church, BEK  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Oldenburg, ELKiO  
Evangelical Reformed Church in Germany, ErK  
Lippe Church, LLK

Subject:

### **HIV/AIDS as a Social, Ethical and Pastoral Challenge to the Church and the Church response**

Conference management:

Pastor F. Y. Amiou, Moderator of the EEPT  
Pastor Dr. L. K. Buama, Moderator of E. P. Church, Ghana  
Pastor G. Baum, President of the Bremen Mission

As participants in the Consultation, we have read Old and New Testament texts in Bible studies, heard various reports from experts, and shared our different experiences and insights.

This is the result of our discussion:

1. We recognize in our time that HIV/AIDS as a reality is spreading fright all over the world. This also affects our countries Germany, Ghana and Togo. AIDS has become a serious threat to the future of our societies and churches.
2. We have learned that HIV/AIDS is transmitted in different ways, among others:
  - through sexual practice (heterosexual and homosexual)
  - by blood transfusion and blood products
  - through injection needles and instruments
  - by the transfer of the mother to the infant at the end of pregnancy, during childbirth and through mother's milk
3. We are convinced that God has given dignity and value to every person. If we follow Jesus Christ, our Lord, and His commandments, we as churches cannot stand silently aside. We must strengthen our campaign against HIV/AIDS.

We as churches are called to facilitate and enable an open discussion about all

problems related to HIV/AIDS and to take care especially of those in our societies who are directly affected by AIDS and suffer from this disease. It is particularly to them that we must offer practical help, such as home care in families with the participation of the communities, and pastoral care.

4. We observe that in our societies, even in our churches, great reservations and restraint towards AIDS prevail and prevent us from dealing with the disease and effectively combating it in an appropriate manner.
5. We therefore especially ask our churches, congregations and church members to take seriously their Christian responsibility towards the people affected. People suffering from AIDS are often stigmatized and excluded from their families and surroundings. As Christians, we have an obligation to accept them without reservation in our midst.
6. We consider it very important that our church members and the people in our societies are informed and educated about this:
  - by what HIV/AIDS is caused
  - how people become infected with the disease
  - how women and men can effectively protect themselves
  - how those who suffer from this disease can be treated medically

We appeal to the churches to exert their influence on governments and pharmaceutical companies to give AIDS sufferers access to drugs that prolong life (antiretroviral drugs, especially against the AIDS virus) and treatment of AIDS-related infections (e. g. tuberculosis, fungal infections, etc.).

7. We see sexuality as a precious gift of God and part of human nature. But we are also aware that this gift can be abused so that it becomes a weapon that destroys life.
8. We are deeply concerned about the violence against women and children in our societies, including the churches, among others:
  - rape
  - child abuse
  - lack of freedom and self-determination for women to decide for themselves about their sexuality
  - disregard of rights for widows and orphans
  - economic conditions forcing women into prostitution
9. We consider it our special obligation to help prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS from mothers to their infants through
  - appropriate training of medical staff
  - the provision of AIDS testing facilities for women
  - the provision of the necessary medicine (such as Nevirapine)

Breastmilk is essential for the nutrition of infants, but it can be dangerous if the mothers are HIV positive.

We therefore recommend that you follow the guidelines of the World Health Organisation (WHO) in this regard.

10. We wish to especially emphasize that the traditional experience of religions, cultures and traditions should play an important role in the common fight against HIV/AIDS.
11. In the face of the threat of HIV/AIDS, we have once again learned the importance of a holistic understanding of human existence. In addition to the necessary medical treatment, people also need spiritual renewal and change.

Paul writes 1 Corinthians 6:19-20:

"What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."