

Report to the 107th Council

Diocese of Atlanta Commission on AIDS

It would be very easy to just take last year's report from the Diocesan Commission on AIDS, make a few date changes, update a comment or two and essentially provide the same report. It would be very easy.....and it would still also be accurate. I have tried to resist that temptation.

None the less, the work of the Diocesan Commission on AIDS continues, however unchanging it may seem to be. The medical condition from which it takes its name continues to creep toward the classification of "chronic" rather than critical or fatal. The characterization of monotony might seem reasonably accurate except for the ministry that has, over the last 22 years, become the primary focus of the Commission on AIDS: The Province IV Network of AIDS Ministries annual Kanuga Retreat. It is at that retreat each June that those of us who sponsor and facilitate the retreat see the reality of life for those for whom HIV/AIDS is NOT a chronic condition, but still a cause for anxiety and worry about the future.

HIV/AIDS is manageable with some very clear qualifications: adequate resources to obtain the treatment and medications necessary to keep the virus at bay, whether large amounts of money or good health insurance; otherwise the remaining resource becomes the public health care system. HIV/AIDS being a manageable condition also requires one to be literate enough and have a comprehension level adequate enough to understand the words on medication bottles and follow the strict regimen required for successful management of HIV/AIDS. For an extraordinarily large percentage of those who now live with HIV/AIDS and who come to the retreat each year, the above qualifiers are daily challenges....challenges often beyond their capabilities.

The 22nd annual retreat held last June again brought a measure of peace and respite to those who attended. They were loved and cared for by a peculiar group of folks known as Episcopalians. And for a precious few days of their lives, their world was a very different and a better place.

Harsh realities face our state: We are 6th in the nation in the rate of deaths from HIV; 4th in the nation in the number of people diagnosed with HIV (2009); 2nd in the nation in the rate of new HIV diagnoses per 100,000 (2009); 9th in the number of new AIDS diagnoses per 100,000 (2009); 4th and 6th respectively in the rates of HIV and AIDS prevalence (2008). [Statistics lag due to reporting and compiling issues.] The rest of Province IV has similar data. HIV hasn't gone away. It just affects very few of those who sit in our pews each Sunday.

The Commission on AIDS is grateful beyond expression for the continued financial support provided by the Diocese of Atlanta that allows us to provide scholarship assistance to those who wish to attend the annual retreat. Sadly, over 80% need assistance to attend. Your generosity and support are appreciated....and we can always use more volunteers to assist with the retreat. Questions may be directed to Bruce Garner at bruce.garner@att.net.

Bruce Garner, Chair (All Saints' Atlanta)

Lola Thomas, Retreat Chair (Church of the Ascension, Cartersville)