



THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The Most Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori
Presiding Bishop and Primate

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The Balm in Gilead's National Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS is an opportunity to again reflect on and rededicate ourselves to the eradication of HIV/AIDS. As we head toward March 6-12, 2011, I encourage Christians to consider the vast toll that AIDS has taken on this world and to consider how you might participate in the work and witness that is, indeed, God's "balm in Gilead."

The Episcopal Church is currently engaged in a robust effort to stem the spread of HIV/AIDS both at home and abroad. If you are unfamiliar with these efforts, I would urge you to consider becoming members of the Episcopal Public Policy Network (www.episcopalchurch/eppn) and the National Episcopal AIDS Coalition (<http://www.neac.org/>). I remain deeply grateful to both these programs for keeping HIV/AIDS at the forefront of our concern.

Unfortunately, stemming the spread of HIV/AIDS has proven particularly difficult in poorer countries around the world. We know that more than 33 million people continue to live with HIV/AIDS and nearly 3 million are newly infected each year. The global economic crisis has made matters worse, pushing as many as 100 million people below the poverty line. In the United States, HIV/AIDS has lost much of its visibility in the past decade as we have grown complacent about the threat of this disease. Certainly, as we head into this vital week of prayer, there is much to pray for and many to hold in our hearts.

I would remind churches in The Episcopal Church and beyond that it isn't always immediately apparent who in our communities is suffering from HIV/AIDS; the stigma of this disease has, at times, alienated those who are in need of our love and support. As Christians, our ministry to those living with HIV/AIDS is to be a balm in the midst of suffering, and to empower and connect our own suffering with that of the wider world. I pray that March 6-12 will be a time when our spirits are stirred and our bodies strengthened for the vital work at hand.

I remain

Your servant in Christ,


Katharine Jefferts Schori