

There is a poem by Joseph Malens entitled “The Ambulance Down In The Valley” that speaks volumes concerning my sincere but short sighted initial ministry with persons who were dying because of complications associated with AIDS. The poem depicts a heated debate about what is the best way to deal with the problem if they had people falling off this cliff high above the city. One faction decided that the most prudent thing to do was to raise money to build a fence at the top of the cliff. Another group responded that the best practice was to park an ambulance down in the valley for it to efficiently transport people to the hospital.

The argument pursued, “Why build a fence? We’ve always had an ambulance in the valley and it worked very well. Why should we raise more funds to build a fence?” Finally, a person of wisdom stood up and said, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” The wisdom of the person won the day and the people built their fence. Needless to say the number of persons falling off the cliff was reduced drastically.

My initial ministry with HIV/AIDS victims was to provide a compassionate funeral celebration. I officiated at a large number of these services during the seventies and early eighties. Many pastors would not officiate at a service if they knew the persons died of AIDS. If they did they were quite judgmental and condemning in their message to a grieving family and friends in attendance living with the disease. As sincere as I was the ministry I provided was equivalent to the ambulance in the valley.

The frequency of the deaths during that period of my ministry cause me to rethink my role as a pastor and I discovered that advocating for prevention of the disease was the position I needed to take. I needed to lead my congregation and community in building fences that prevented the spread of this disease.

Parnessa Seele and the Balm in Gilead Black Week of Prayer, which has now morphed into the National Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS, became an appropriate vehicle to promote prevention. The resources that included bulletin covers, inserts with accurate up to date facts about the disease and ideas for sermons became invaluable. Our worship became the most opportune time to educate our members concerning HIV/AIDS.

I strongly support the Balm of Gilead’s 2011 national Week of Prayer for the Healing of Aids and pledge my support to continue to build fences of prevention until we no longer need ambulances in the valley.