

2012

# How to Organize an HIV Testing Event

The United Methodist Church



*Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. Matthew 4:23*

The United Methodist Church  
Global Health Initiative Committee  
Louisiana Conference UMC



# **How to Organize an HIV Testing Event**

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## **Background Information**

### ***What are HIV and AIDS, and how do you get it?***

HIV is the human immunodeficiency virus that results in a chronic and incurable infection. HIV affects the body's immune system. AIDS, which stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, is the disease caused by HIV. AIDS suppresses the body's immune system and increases a person's susceptibility to secondary opportunistic bacterial, fungal, parasitic and viral infections that normally would be killed by a healthy immune system. HIV destroys specific blood cells that help the body fight diseases. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, HIV is spread primarily by:

- Not using a condom when having sex with a person who has HIV.
- Sharing needles, syringes, rinse water, or other equipment used to prepare illicit drugs for injection.
- Being born to an infected mother—HIV can be passed from mother to child during pregnancy, birth, or breast-feeding.

Among women living with HIV/AIDS, the predominant known mode of transmission is high-risk heterosexual contact followed by injection drug use. Among men living with HIV/AIDS, the predominant mode of transmission is men who have sex with men followed by high-risk heterosexual contact.

According to the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 1,178,350 adults and adolescents were living with HIV infection in the United States at the end of 2008, the most recent year for which national estimates are available. This represents a 7 percent increase from 2006. Health officials credit the increase to more people becoming infected with HIV than the number of people who die from HIV or AIDS. HIV/AIDS does not discriminate. Anyone can get the virus. It affects every age, sex and religion.

### ***How bad is the HIV and AIDS problem in Louisiana?***

The latest numbers, from a Sept. 30, 2011 report from the Louisiana Office of Public Health, show that Louisiana has a cumulative total 31,827 HIV/AIDS cases, which include 322 pediatric cases. Louisiana ranks fifth-highest for AIDS case rates and 12<sup>th</sup> in the country in the number of cases diagnosed in 2009, according to the CDC. The Baton Rouge area ranked second among metropolitan areas in the United States for AIDS case rates in 2009; the New Orleans metropolitan area ranked ninth.

In Louisiana, 28 percent of new HIV cases and 34 percent of new AIDS cases are among women. HIV continues to disproportionately affect African Americans in Louisiana. In 2010, 74 percent of newly diagnosed HIV cases and 78 percent of newly diagnosed AIDS cases were among African Americans.

### ***What are some common misconceptions about HIV and AIDS?***

There is a great deal of information available about HIV/AIDS; unfortunately, much of the information is incorrect. Some common misconceptions, compiled by the United Methodist Global AIDS Fund, include:

- **HIV is spread by mosquitoes.** According to the CDC, HIV/AIDS cannot be transmitted by mosquitoes or other blood-sucking insects.
- **HIV/AIDS is a gay man's disease.** Although HIV/AIDS disproportionately affects gay men, the virus is also spread through heterosexual contacts, blood-to-blood transmission and mother-to-child transmission. According to MedicineNet.com, the most common method of transmission worldwide is through heterosexual contact.
- **HIV/AIDS can be spread by hugging, kissing, sharing food or sitting on toilet seats.** HIV/AIDS cannot be spread by saliva, mucous or sweat, so casual contact with HIV/AIDS-infected persons does not put one at risk of transmission. The CDC says HIV can be spread only through contact with blood, semen, vaginal fluid or breast milk.

### ***The importance of testing***

HIV is spread by unprotected sex and sharing needles, and it is transmitted from mothers to their unborn babies. The state tracks the number of people who test positive and those who develop AIDS. People who are HIV positive can continue to spread the disease to other people if they don't know their HIV status. The possibility of transmitting the virus becomes exponentially greater when someone unknowingly transmits the virus to a person and then that person unknowingly transmits it to someone else. HIV testing becomes a critical method of prevention of the transmission of the virus.

### ***Why is the United Methodist Church involved in this?***

One simply has to turn to the Holy Bible to find our responsibility in reaching out to those who have been inflicted by HIV. As Donald Messer, chairman of the United Methodist Global Aids Fund, wrote in his essay "Biblical Foundation," Jesus Christ showed us how we are to respond to this health crisis:

*"Reread the life of Jesus as it is portrayed in the Gospel – it is shocking to discover how he repeatedly encounters crowds of sick persons. For example, near the end of Matthew 4, we are told that everywhere he went he was engaged in healing the ill. He did so without stigmatizing the sick, asking how they got ill or treating some ill persons as unworthy of treatment or care. Jesus showed no preferences or prejudice, but repeatedly told his disciples to "heal every kind of disease and illness." (Matthew 10:1). In Matthew 5, he delivers the Sermon on the Mount. He begins with the Beatitudes, asserting that "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." Christians are called to a ministry of healing, showing compassion and care to the infected and the affected, and educating every generation on how to keep from getting*

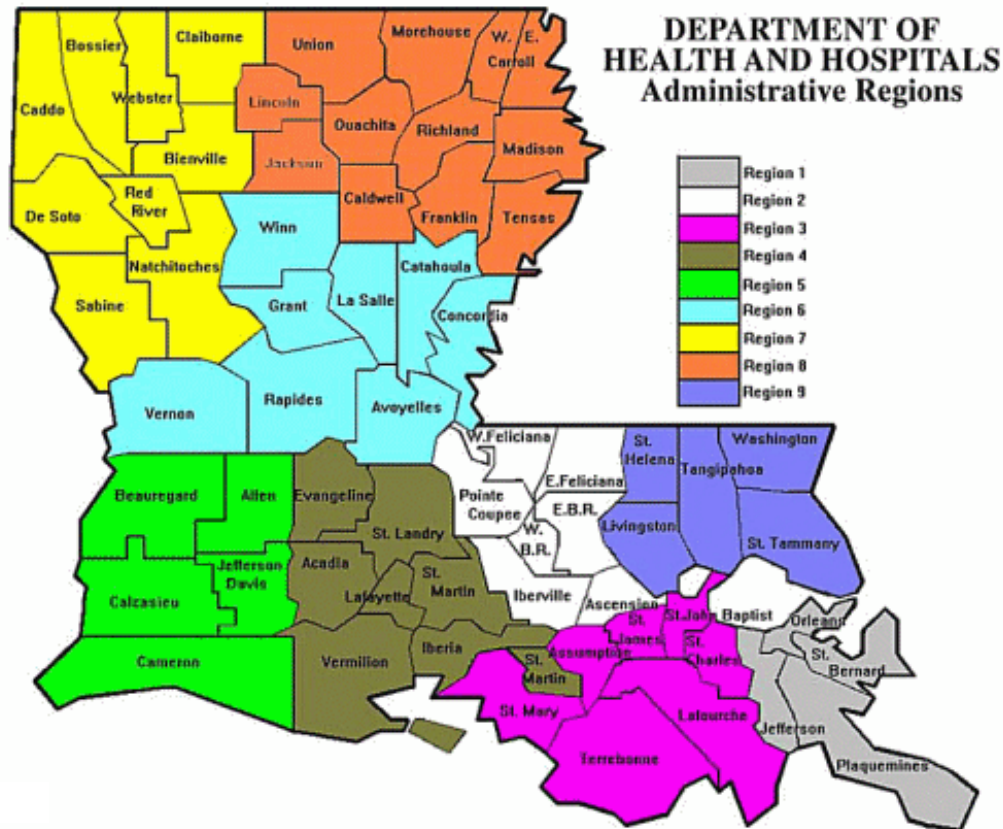
*infected. The tragedy of the contemporary church has been its failure to follow the Great Physician. Unlike Jesus, who especially reached out to the leper, the marginalized, the ostracized and unloved in his society, many Christians have rejected and mistreated persons who are HIV positive. Even their families have suffered from the church's callousness."*

As Messer writes, Christians "cannot tolerate genocide of indifference" when it comes to caring for those who have HIV. "The Biblical basis of the United Methodist Global Aids Fund moves us from apathy to action and condemnation to compassion."

## Getting Started – first steps toward setting up your HIV Testing Event

### *Contact the state regional coordinator*

The state Department of Health and Hospitals sets standards for testing sites, trains volunteers and provides support through coordinators. Every parish is in a region, and each region has an HIV/AIDS coordinator. These coordinators are an invaluable source of information and support for those who are planning an HIV Testing Event. Here is a map of the DHH regions:



Each region has an HIV/AIDS coordinator. The coordinators are:

Regions 1, 3 and 9 – Allison Vertovec

[Allison.Vertovec@la.gov](mailto:Allison.Vertovec@la.gov)

Region 2 – Eugene Collins

[Eugene.collins@la.gov](mailto:Eugene.collins@la.gov)

Regions 4, 5 and 6 – Michael Kirkland

[Michael.Kirkland@la.gov](mailto:Michael.Kirkland@la.gov)

Regions 7 and 8 – Susan Wible

[Susan.Wible@la.gov](mailto:Susan.Wible@la.gov)

The organizers should set up a meeting with his or her regional coordinator to discuss the HIV Testing Event plans. The coordinator can help walk organizers through the volunteer training process, advise on local HIV/AIDS community-based organizations that are willing to work with United Methodist and help identify high-risk areas where testing would be best conducted.

The organizer should ask the regional coordinator to be a member of the planning committee so an expert will be available during committee meetings to answer technical questions regarding HIV/AIDS and coordinating the testing event.

### ***Recruit HIV Testers and Counselors***

To plan an HIV testing event, organizers must recruit individuals who will agree to train to serve as testers and counselors. The best source for volunteers usually is within your local church congregation. Volunteers should have a strong commitment to the project and be willing and able to complete the training procedure. Each testing site requires at least one tester to administer the Rapid HIV test and one counselor who will counsel anyone who has a positive test result. The counselor also will help with paper work.

The state of Louisiana's procedure for volunteer testers and counselors is outlined at [www.HIV411.org](http://www.HIV411.org). Go to the website and click on "Resource Central." Then, choose "C&T Trainings," go to the bottom of the page, and click on the "Download the HIV 101 Self-Study Guide." The guide contains all of the information a volunteer needs to pass the online quiz, which is mandatory to qualify for testing and counselor training.

After reading the manual, volunteers should return to [www.HIV411.org](http://www.HIV411.org), go "Resource Central" and click on "C&T Trainings." Go to the link at the top of the page that says "Click here to apply for combined HIV Prevention Counseling and Rapid Testing Training." This will send volunteers to a three-stage process, where they can take the online quiz (which tests knowledge of information in the self-study guide), provide some personal information about themselves and sign up for a training session.

Because the state has a shortage of trained volunteers, organizers cannot rely on the state to provide testers and counselors. For example, at a recent testing event in Baton Rouge, there were only five testing sites because of the lack of trained people in the Baton Rouge area. If the testing event is going to coincide with National HIV Testing Day June 27th, organizers definitely will have to recruit their own volunteers to be trained because the state and other HIV/AIDS programs in the area will use all the available trained people for other events.

### ***Use churches in targeted areas at testing sites***

Just as the best source for volunteers is your church, the church building probably is the best venue for a testing site. If you plan to have more than one testing site, utilize churches closest to the target areas.

Any new testing site at a church (or elsewhere, for that matter) will have to be certified by the state. The minimum requirement is that the site must have two adjacent rooms to be used during

the testing. New testing sites are certified by the state's regional coordinator, who should already be involved. The site certification process will take a minimum of two weeks.

If you wish to use a church as a testing site, contact the church leadership to obtain permission to use the facilities.

### ***Recruit committee members***

Organizers should recruit people to serve on the HIV Testing Event committee to help with planning, logistics and execution. As with the tester and counselor volunteers, one of the best places to find volunteers is in local church congregations.

There can be any number of committee members, but the suggestion is that five to six people works best. With this number of committee members, responsibility for different tasks can be assigned to different members. If the event is going to use several churches, it is suggested that a representative from each church serve on the committee. This person could be the pastor or a lay person.

The United Methodist District Superintendent can be a resource in helping to identify an area coordinator to work with event organizers and committee members.



## **Getting Closer to Your HIV Testing Event**

### ***Hold first committee meeting***

Now that you have identified volunteers, a testing site and committee members, it is time to hold a committee meeting. This likely will be the first time everyone will be able to discuss all the logistics, planning and information related to the event, so it is important to work from an agenda to keep vital information from falling through the cracks. Some of the items that should be part of that first meeting agenda include:

- Names of potential testing and counseling volunteers
- Possible venues for testing sites
- A preliminary publicity plan
- Possible dates for the testing event
- Potential allies and partners
- Assignment of responsibilities for each action item
- Setting the time, date and place of the next meeting

### ***Training for HIV testers and counselors***

Volunteers must undergo training from the state Department of Health and Hospitals in order to provide testing or counseling services. The website, [www.HIV411.org](http://www.HIV411.org), has all of the information concerning training. It is highly recommended that at least one person on the committee be responsible for ensuring that a sufficient number of people have volunteered and successfully completed the required training.

Volunteers should understand that two days are required to complete training.

### ***Getting testing sites certified***

The state's regional HIV/AIDS coordinator can assist organizers in getting sites certified. The minimum requirement is that two separate but adjoining rooms be available. Also, the two rooms should not be in high traffic areas in order to protect the confidentiality of the person being tested. The site certification process can take about two weeks, so make sure to build in that time to the overall event timeline.

## **Promoting Your HIV Testing Event**

Promotion is the key to having a successful event. Superior planning without supporting promotion will ensure that you have the best event that no one participates in because no one knew about it. There's nothing magical or mysterious about promoting your event. It just requires some organization and willingness to reach out to people through networking, social media, mass media and other marketing paths.

### ***Ally partners/churches***

Organizers can choose to make the event a Methodist-only event; however, it is recommended that the committee reach out to other congregations and organizations. The state regional HIV/AIDS coordinator can be of great assistance in identifying other congregations, groups, agencies or organizations that are willing to partner with others to ensure a successful event.

### ***Social media and online marketing***

Social media is not a fad or a gimmick; it is a powerful communications movement that can reach millions of people at no cost, making it a perfect tool to promote your HIV testing event. Facebook, in particular, reaches more people across the United States every day than do the combined reach of newspapers, magazines, television and radio. And, like every other form of mass media, social media sites are used to promote incredibly diverse points of view, causes, political movements, religious groups, hobbies; in short, social media is a tool. There is nothing inherently good, bad, misleading, evil or sacred about social media sites, they are simply avenues of communication, just like your television set.

Many churches now have Facebook sites. If one of the testing sites is a church, ask that the church include an item on its Facebook page about the testing event. Ask Facebook friends to spread the word on their own pages about the event; getting just a dozen more people to post an item on Facebook can literally inform thousands of people about the event.

### ***News release***

A news release is a key component of your publicity efforts because it is such a versatile tool. A news release lets all of the recipients know about your testing event, when and where it will occur, who can participate and why you are doing it. Also, you can encourage recipients to pass the news release to others, thereby adding to the number of people who get the information. In the case of the news media, your hope is that the newspaper, magazine, website, television station or radio station will publish or broadcast the information, spreading the word exponentially. Lastly, a news release can be posted on your website, on your Facebook page or included in a blog, increasing its reach even further.

Writing a good news release takes a little time and practice, but no formal training or experience is required. Get three or four other people to read the news release after you've written the first draft, and consider incorporating their suggestions, especially if more than one person has pointed out something that is unclear or confusing.

Here are a few basics that should be included in your news release:

1. **What is the event?** Make sure you are very clear in what you are doing. An HIV testing event is set up so that anyone can be tested for the HIV virus or AIDS. A poorly written news release could lead some people to believe that only Methodists can participate, so be clear in your purpose.
2. **When is the event?** Be clear in your date, day of the week and time. Make sure the day of the week and the date coincide (you'd be surprised how many professionally written news releases have this mistake).
3. **Where is the event?** Don't assume everyone knows where the First Methodist Church is, especially since your news release could get distributed into another town. Give the full address, including the city.
4. **Who is putting on the event?** Be clear that this is a service of United Methodists, not a government-run event.
5. **Why is the event being held?** Tell people about your mission, the Biblical foundation of what you are doing and why it is important.
6. **Some statistics about the HIV/AIDS problem in our community.** This information should be adjacent to your mission and will support your cause.
7. **A quote from the pastor or coordinator.** A good quote humanizes the news release and puts a name behind the effort.
8. **A reference to a website or Facebook page for more information.** This not only gives an interested reader more information to seek, it also gives the news release more validity. An event that is backed up by online information gives your event more credence.
9. **A person to contact for more information.** This can be the coordinator, the pastor or a volunteer. The important thing is that this person be knowledgeable about the event and willing to be contacted by phone or e-mail by the media, who may want more information or be looking for someone who is willing to be interviewed.

At the end of this manual, see Appendix A for a sample news release you can use as a guide.

After you've written, edited, double-checked and peer-reviewed your news release, it is time to distribute it. To whom should it go? Obviously, you want to send it to the local news media, meaning the local newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations as well as online news publications. Each of the above should have websites that tell you how and to whom to send your news release. If not, call the organization, tell them you want to send a news release and ask them to best way to do it. Most prefer e-mail, but a few places may ask you to fax the news release to them.

If you have multiple contacts at one place, such as a reporter and an editor at the local paper, send it to both of them. They are used to getting news releases, and it can only increase your chances of getting published.

Besides the news media, make sure to send the news release to everyone involved in the event. Nothing is more discouraging to a volunteer than to work on an event and find out they were excluded from a major component of the event, i.e., news release distribution.

Also, send the news release to any partner organizations, members of the congregation, other churches, local public officials, local health officials, HIV/AIDS advocacy groups, local medical clinics, hospitals and social service groups, including the local United Way office and Salvation Army. Anyone you can think of who has contact with people who could benefit from your testing event should be on your news release distribution list.

### ***Using local media***

Besides sending them a copy of your news release, there are other ways to use local media to promote your event, and the best part is that it doesn't cost anything. Unlike advertising, in which you pay for space in a newspaper advertisement or time on a TV/radio commercial, news coverage is free, often referred to as "earned media." A reporter in your town's newspaper may be interested in writing an article before the event occurs. After you've sent the news release, contact your local newspaper and ask to speak to the editor. Explain your event and ask if the paper would like to write an article. A good way to convince the paper on covering the event is to point out the severity of the HIV/AIDS problem in your community. News people are always looking for a "hook," something they consider newsworthy that will make the story relevant, and the more information you have, the better the chances are that you will receive recognition from the newspaper.

Television stations that have local morning newscasts are always looking for interesting guests. Local morning television is a great venue for community events. The church's pastor, event coordinator or a designated publicity chairman should be the person who would be interviewed. Typically, these morning newscasts are broadcast live, and the interview takes place at the television studio. To set this up, call the station and ask for the producer of the morning show. While you're on the phone, also ask for the station's assignments editor, and ask that person if the station would be interested in doing a story on the event. Since the assignment editor presumably has already received your news release, he or she should be familiar with the event.

### ***News conference***

It is not necessary to hold a news conference, but it can be an effective way to get word out through the community, via the mass media. A news conference is an event to which members of the news media are invited to be informed and to inform others of a newsworthy event, report, policy initiative or just about anything that could be construed as news. In this instance, a news conference would be held to announce the HIV/AIDS testing event and to spread the word throughout the community that free HIV/AIDS testing will be available.

During a news conference, a main speaker – probably the area coordinator, or perhaps a minister at a church serving as a testing site – informs members of the news media about the event. It is

customary to have a news release available at the news conference to reinforce the information given by the main speaker.

Other people who should attend the news conference are ally organizations, the state regional coordinator, members of the committee and the volunteer testers and counselors. It is not necessary for all of these people to speak; in fact, a long line of speakers will tend to aggravate members of the news media who showed up.

The most important people to invite to a news conference are members of the news media. A short email or fax should be sent to reporters and editors several days before the news conference. A follow-up email or phone call the day before is also important. Remember, members of the news media have multiple requests for coverage every day, so the more often you can gently remind them of your news conference, the greater your chances of getting coverage.

Keep the news conference relatively short, no more than 20-25 minutes.

Betty Backstrom, Director of Communications, Louisiana Conference, is available as a resource to promote the event. You can contact her at 225-346-1646 or [bettybackstrom@la-umc.org](mailto:bettybackstrom@la-umc.org).

**APPENDIX A**  
**sample news release**

*May 23, 2012*  
*For immediate release*

*For more information,*  
*contact Joe Smith, 225-555-1212*  
[joesmith@aol.com](mailto:joesmith@aol.com)

**First United Methodist Church to host HIV/AIDS Testing Event**

Baton Rouge, La. – The Rev. Bob Jones announced on Wednesday that the First United Methodist Church of Baton Rouge will conduct free HIV/AIDS testing for people in the community on Saturday, June 2.

The volunteer testers and counselors have been trained and certified by the state Department of Health and Hospitals, and the identities of all people who participate in the testing will be kept confidential, Rev. Jones said.

“Christ taught us to care for our neighbors and to minister to the sick,” Rev. Jones said. “This terrible virus is taking a toll on our community, and part of the tragedy is that thousands and thousands of people are carrying this virus, and they don’t even know it. There are treatments available for those who test positive, so we are urging people who may be at risk to come to First Methodist on Saturday morning and take this important, free test.”

Rev. Jones said the testing is completely confidential and will be conducted under guidelines prepared by the state health department. The testing will be held at the First United Methodist Church of Baton Rouge at 930 North Boulevard in downtown Baton Rouge.

Other groups supporting the event include the state Department of Health and Hospitals, United Way, (name all ally groups and organizations).

The latest numbers, from a Sept. 30, 2011 report from the Louisiana Office of Public Health, show that Louisiana has a cumulative total 31,827 HIV/AIDS cases, which include 322 pediatric cases. Louisiana ranks fifth-highest for AIDS case rates and 12<sup>th</sup> in the country in the number of cases diagnosed in 2009, according to the CDC. Among metropolitan areas in the country the Baton Rouge area ranked second for AIDS case rates in 2009; the New Orleans metropolitan area ranked ninth.

“Clearly, this is a big issue in our community, and I am proud that First United Methodist Church is helping to lead the way in community knowledge, health and caring,” Rev. Jones said.

## **Appendix B**

### **Pre-Event Checklist**

- Learn the facts about HIV/AIDS
- Contact the Department of Health & Hospitals regional HIV/AIDS coordinator
- Set up a meeting with the regional HIV/AIDS Coordinator
- Recruit the planning committee for the testing event
- Host first planning committee meeting
- Choose Date and times for Testing Event
- Choose testing sites based on high target areas provided by regional HIV/AIDS coordinator.
- Assign tasks to committee members
- Visit testing sites and make sure you have proper permissions
- Recruit volunteer tester and counselors
- Help with organizing the training of the volunteer testers and trainers.
- Make sure that the Department of Health & Hospitals regional HIV/AIDS coordinator gets all testing sites certified. (Can take two weeks to process)
- Reconfirm the availability of the testing sites
- Assign Testers and counselors to their testing site
- Start promoting your testing day using social media
- Prepare News Release
- Set up Press conference
- Prepare press packets with information about
- HIV/AIDS and the Press Release
- Hold Press Conference.
- Reconfirm with testers & councilors that they will be able to be at their testing site.
- Confirm with the regional HIV/AIDS coordinator how testing supplies will be delivered.

- On the day of the testing, make sure you have a way to contact each site. Most people have cell phones that you can use as way to contact the team. Be sure to check in with your sites to see how they are doing.
- Coordinate with regional HIV/AIDS Coordinator how to return unused supplies and all the paper work.
- Have a follow-up planning committee meeting to access the results of your testing event.