



Saddleback Church: S.L.O.W. OR S.T.O.P.?

Since the appearance of AIDS in the 1980s, people have been working to slow its spread. But slowing the HIV/AIDS pandemic isn't enough. It's time to stop it.

Current prevention strategies to S.L.O.W. the pandemic include:

Supply condoms and eventually microbicides for everyone. The correct and consistent use of condoms may prevent HIV infection. But condoms will never stop the pandemic. In many places, getting condoms is nearly impossible. And even when a person has a condom and uses it properly, there still is a chance the condom will fail. Likewise, microbicides – which researchers hope will enable women to protect themselves – will only reduce risk, not eliminate it; the development of effective microbicides is still years away.

Limit the number of partners. The fewer sexual partners someone has, the less chance there is that a person will contract HIV. But limiting the number of partners will never stop the spread of HIV.

Offer needle exchange. Some people believe that giving new, clean needles to intravenous drug users reduces their risk of contracting HIV from a needle shared by someone who is HIV positive. While clean needles may reduce the risk of transmitting HIV, the resulting impaired judgment can enable other high risk sexual behavior thus exposing the individual to HIV.

Wait for sexual debut. The longer a person waits to become sexually active, the longer he or she will stay free from the risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease.

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Though these S.L.O.W. strategies are relatively simple to implement and will work to slow the pandemic, they won't stop AIDS. If AIDS is to be stopped, the church must get involved.

The church can use its moral authority to S.T.O.P. the spread of HIV/AIDS by encouraging and supporting these four strategies:

Save sex for marriage. When two HIV-free individuals save sex for marriage and remain mutually faithful after marriage, they eliminate their risk of contracting HIV through sexual activity. By saving sex for marriage, there would likely be a dramatic decrease in the number of new infections.

Teach men and boys to respect women and children. Around the world, children can be victimized by the behavior of others. In many cultures, women, too, are at the mercy of men. As a result, children and women often contract HIV through unwanted sexual encounters. If the hearts of men would change to a biblical view that respects and values women and children, lives would change for the better.

Open the door for the church. With 2.3 billion people claiming to be followers of Christ, local churches offer a significant volunteer base for HIV prevention, care, treatment, support and substance abuse recovery. Churches also have the widest distribution with churches found in places that have no hospital or even health clinic.

Pledge fidelity to one partner for life. Labeled as a fringe idea by many groups around the world, having one sexual partner for life eliminates much of the risk of contracting HIV. This is where faith comes in: A vibrant faith gives power to be faithful.

With 2.7 million new HIV infections each year, the HIV/AIDS pandemic demands a response from all churches and believers. The Church is the difference between slowing and stopping AIDS.