



NO. 4, SENCHI STREET, AIRPORT RESIDENTIAL AREA, ACCRA

**THE SYMPOSIUM OF EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES OF AFRICA AND
MADAGASCAR (SECAM)**

PASTORAL STATEMENT FOR THE WORLD AIDS DAY – 2015

**The Call of the Church on Persons Living with HIV and AIDS and
their Affected Families**

1. One of the tenets of our faith as Christians is the fundamental belief that life is sacred from conception to death. Life remains sacred in all its forms and conditions of our existence, including illness. In fact, it is when, due to the fragility of the mortal nature of life, we have the sick among us that we are called upon to offer the greatest solidarity in defence of the sacredness of life.¹
2. On 1st December 2015, the Church joins the rest of the world to commemorate the "World Aids Day" with the multi-year theme of "Getting to Zero: Zero new HIV infections. Zero deaths from AIDS-related illness. Zero discrimination." Furthermore, this year this celebration falls within the year that SECAM has declared as the "African Year of Reconciliation" (29 July 2015 - 29 July 2016). A little after the World Aids Day, the Universal Church will start to celebrate the Year of Mercy starting on 8th December 2015. It is in this context that SECAM wishes to address the issue of persons living with HIV and AIDS and their affected families.
3. We have noted that the family as a whole, not only the individual members, is affected by HIV and AIDS in profound and tragic ways, thus putting pressure on the fundamental characteristic of the African family system, which is the strong emotional ties that bind members together and promote sharing and mutual dependence. In addition, stigmatisation has led many families to hide the truth about the illness or cause of death of family members with HIV and AIDS. It also leads to serious feelings of being neglected, both in the home and community, thus becoming another root cause responsible for the spread of HIV.
4. As African Bishops, in view of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the theme "The vocation and mission of the family in the Church and the contemporary world", we reaffirmed the family system as the central source of support. (The Future of the Family, our Mission, 2015). We have noted that

¹ St. John Paul II, *Message to the General Director of the World Health Organization, on the occasion of the first World Aids Day, 1988.*

that disclosure of one's HIV and AIDS status is an important part of coping with the disease and ensuring family support for PLWHA (SECAM Pastoral Training Manual in response to HIV and AIDS, 2014).

5. We therefore wish to commend our families in being true Disciples of Christ for the care they give to the sick among them. We applaud the gallant contribution of our Home Based care groups, the Small Christian Communities, the Religious women and men who run hospices for the support they give to PLWHA. All these are testimonies of the unconditional love preached by Our Lord Jesus Christ in Mk. 12.31. Unconditional love is also the true basis for reconciliation. In this African Year of Reconciliation, we pray for healing among families and local communities who may have experiences strains in relationships as a consequence of the presence of HIV and AIDS among.

6. We call upon all faith communities to exercise charity and mercy as they seek to help persons to recover and restore relationships strained by the presence of HIV and AIDS in our communities. SECAM, therefore in the occasion of the celebration of this World Aids Day on December 1st 2015, is calling upon all people of goodwill to stand together with the Christian communities for the promotion of human dignity and the respect of the family. The family which is the fundamental bond of the "covenant between the Church and God creation"²; and also "the main and indispensable cornerstone of the social life"³.

7. In view of the Papal declaration of the Extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy, we wish to intensify the promotion of compassion in our responses to the challenges of HIV and AIDS in local parishes and Catholic-inspired organisations.

SECAM SECRETARIAT 30 NOVEMBER 2015

² Pope Francis, *Message to the Bishops during the World Conference on Family, Philadelphia, 28 September 2015*.

³ Pope Francis, *The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and the Contemporary World, Instrumentum laboris, n° 11*.