

Mission of Health and Healing: A Christ-Healed Church is HIV positive Church

Introduction: Health and Healing

As written in the vision and mission statement of The Methodist Church of Southern Africa, the MCSA seeks to work for “A Christ healed Africa”(vision) and to “proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ for healing and transformation” (mission). The concept of healing is therefore central to the mission work of the MCSA. It IS THE lens by which the MCSA visualizes and actualizes its ministry and mission in Southern Africa, in Africa and the world as a whole. It is therefore important that we should have a working definition of “healing” and to continually revisit our work as the church to check if we are God’s healing hands in our churches, communities and countries.

Although there are many definitions of the concept of healing, and although I want to believe that in the past two days the concept has been explicated to you by several speakers, I wish to add to the definition from three perspectives; namely,

1. The Creation –centered perspective
2. The New Christ-centric Perspective
3. The Afro-centric perspective.

The bulk of my paper will focus on HIV and AIDS revelations about our churches, communities and how we need to implement healing in our mission. My focus will, be asking: after thirsty-five years later what has the apocalypse of HIV and taught us about being an HIV and AIDS positive church and how to carry out our mission of healing and transformation through the gospel of Christ. It is my thesis that “a Christ healed church” is an HIV and AIDS positive church, a church that seeks to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ for healing and transformation.” In other words, to proclaim ourselves as an HIV positive church is consistent with the vision, mission, values and the pillars of The Methodist Church of Southern Africa .

Thereafter, during a brief group activities, you will explore how the five pillars of your mission conference converge on healing, especially from the perspective of an HIV positive church.

Healing the Creation Perspective

The drama of creation, as presented in Genesis 1 occurs through God’s spoken word, when God calls various members of creation into being by saying “let there be...” (vv. 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26). And there was! The created members of the Earth community come into being through God’s spoken word. They take their place in the stage of creation. Seven

times God evaluated and pronounced that each created member is “beautiful”. Finally God said “let us make humankind in our image,” and endowed human beings with stewardship. This creation story is significant in itself, since it characterizes all members of the Earth Community as concrete products of the word of God. The light, sun, moon, stars and the atmosphere are God’s word with us. When we see the sea and all sea life we are seeing God with us. The dry grounds, vegetation, animals and birds are concrete attestations of God’s word among us. People of all identities are made of of God’s image. We are, therefore, surrounded by the awesome presence of God, in and through the whole creation.

The story of Genesis 1, underlines the interconnectedness, balance, beauty and sacredness of all members of the creation community, in so doing it underlines that an important part of our health has to do with keeping the Earth sacred stature. Much of physical illness that attack our bodies are related to Human pollution of the Earth, which enters the food chain. The story of Genesis 1, also underlines that all people were created in God’s image, all were blessed; all were given stewardship; all were given food. In so doing, the Genesis 1 story gives us a vision of a healed Earth Community. Healing is living according the values of God the creator, who created all members sacred and blessed all people. Where the Earth is degraded, polluted, overstretched; where people are poor, discriminated, tortured; denied leadership, the will of God the Creator is violated—and the health of members of creation are compromised. Our vision for a Christ healed Africa, for the healing of nations; and our mission that seeks to “proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ for healing and transformation;” should enlist us as a church that seeks to be in partnership with God in maintaining the whole Earth community as sacred. Environmental issues and defending the right of all members of the Creation community are central to our quest for healing.

Christocentric Understanding of Health and Health

How did Jesus articulate healing and Health? There should numerous ways of answering this question. Here I just wish to focus on the Luke 4: 16-22. This verse captures the first sermon that was preached by Jesus after returning from his temptation. This sermon is sometimes referred to as the agenda of Jesus’ ministry, since it captures what he did throughout his proclamation. The verse tells us that

¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”^[a]

Jesus articulation of healing includes prophetic words; it underlines economic healing, it includes structural healing and as well as physical healing. Note that Jesus began preaching this gospel of wholistic healing in his own home.

African Understanding of Health

In the African perspective, Health does not only refer to lack of body pains. Rather, health refers to the whole well being of an individual in all aspects of one's life. One is well or healthy if one is socially, economically, spiritually, environmentally and physically well. Health refers to a balance in all these relationships occupied by an individual and communities. Therefore, one is well if they: Have good relationships with relatives, neighbors, the environment, the community at large and Divine Powers (*Badimo*); One is well if they are fairly successful in whatever they do eg. Crops, cows, school, business etc and have no bodily pains."¹

For example, If seasonal rains fail, if a neighbor has lost relative, if a member of the family is unwell, if crops fail, "**gare aa tsoga,**" we are not well." As I have argued elsewhere, "health among Batswana, and in most southern African communities, is closely associated with healthy relationships and interconnectedness. Illness is thus almost synonymous with unhealthy relationships. Healing physical illness, among indigenous doctors often begins with attending to all the social relationships of the consulting clients"² From the African perspective, therefore healing is the restoration of all the relationships that an individual and their communities inhabit. Healing is working for the maintenance of affirming relationships for all members of our communities, for health defines being in healthy relationships with family, neighbors, community, the environment, spiritual powers and our economic projects. It follows that if we understand healing and health from the African perspective, then we should be working against all that alienate people from their bodies, their environment, their spirituality and their economic need.

As a Christ healed Church, working for the healing of the nations, our mission is to focus on addressing all the social, economic, spiritual relationships that alienate people from good health. Our mission should seek to promote and to multiply healthy relationships—for in so doing we will be promoting healing.—In so doing will not be far from living out our mission of seeking to "proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ for healing and transformation."

At this point, I want to move to HIV and AIDS and explore the revelations that it has brought to us as the Church. I propose that HIV and AIDS has been an apocalyptic or revelatory text, that bids us to carry out our mission of healing and transforming our relationships, by embracing the identity of being an HIV positive church.

The HIV and AIDS Apocalyptic Script as Missional Kairos

Although HIV and AIDS was, and still is, a global epidemic, the African continent has had a lion's share of those infected and affected. Sub-Saharan Africa alone accounted for an estimated 69% percent of all people living with HIV and 70 percent of all AIDS deaths in 2011. In these three and half decades we have expanded old cemeteries, opened new cemeteries, bought more coffins than we dare to remember nor to forget. The trail of tears from our homes to the graveside has been so frequent that, the boundaries between the living and the dead became thin and blurred. The apocalyptic texts of HIV and AIDS are inscribed upon our bodies, etched upon our memories and spirits. The African continent and its church bears the wounds of HIV and AIDS upon its social, economic and political body.

Thirty-five years of struggling to reduce and arrest HIV and AIDS, with marginal breakthroughs compared to the efforts invested, it soon became evident that it is also a social justice issue that highlighted fractures in the foundations of our relationships, socially, culturally, economically and politically and called for re-evaluation.

The HIV and AIDS era was thus an apocalyptic text that cast new light on individual and communal ethical capacities.¹ It threw light, exposing the making of **our social structures** and how they impacted people and their capacity to make decisions and to implement them. For example, while the messages of individual and communal behavioural change were preached widely, using the media and other resources, the educational campaign often yielded very small dividends. In fact, the more the message was spread, the higher the statistics of infection, death, rape and orphaned children climbed. 80% of married women who were infected had been faithful to their husbands; abstaining virgins and nuns were raped and infected; men and boys carrying condoms in their pockets did not always use them, lest they demonstrate unmanly fear, while some could not gain access to condoms. Many men who needed to undergo voluntary counselling and testing to become eligible for treatment, either used their wives to check their status or preferred to die than check their status, and face the possibility of being pronounced HIV positive! Pharmaceuticals companies, did not voluntarily yield: they were not moved by the death of millions, for they still preferred to sell for profit than to give patent rights for the production of affordable drugs. Churches, bodies that were supposedly communities of compassion and healing, did not automatically come out as welcoming institutions that live by the rule of love your neighbour as yourself or when you see the sick identify Christ in their faces.² Similarly, African families and communities proved to be less welcoming than the demands of their *ubuntu* values, that teach that our humanity is perpetually dependent on recognizing, respecting and welcoming the Other. In the Ubuntu ethical thinking, one's identity is performed and measured through the capacity to consistently make room for the Other in their space.³

¹ See Musa W: Dube, "African Women's Hermeneutics and the HIV/AIDS Apocalypse," in Musa W. Dube, *The HIV & AIDS Bible*, 99-122.

² See UNAIDS, *A Report of a Theological Workshop Focusing on HIV and AIDS Related Stigma* (Geneva: UNAIDS, 2005).

³ See Joseph B. Gaie and Sana K. Mmolai eds. *The Concept of Botho and HIV/AIDS in Botswana* (Eldoret: Zapt Chancery, 2007), for an exploration of how *Ubuntu* should inform our response to HIV and AIDS.

The HIV and AIDS struggle became a global missional moment as churches needed to think together and act together.⁴ The questions as to what does it mean to be church in the HIV and AIDS era; what kind of church do we need to become; what kind of theology should support the mission of the church to God's people in the HIV and AIDS era became crucial. The African church began to construct a different theology, with a different ethics.⁵ This is the theological framework of an HIV Positive Church. I want to highlight the foundations, characteristics and ethics of the HIV positive church as the basis for us to fulfill our vision and mission of building a Christ-healed Africa by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ for healing and transformation

Foundations, Characteristics and Ethics of the HIV Positive Church

Much theological work has been done to present the church as an HIV positive body of Christ.⁶ This construction of the HIV positive church rose independently among different scholars and activists in different places.⁷ They were united by their confrontation with HIV epidemic, stigmatization and discrimination from the larger society, and drawing from images of Christ who identifies with the marginalized (Matt 25:31-46) and the Pauline image of the church as the body of Christ that is united in pain and joy (1 Cor 12:26). The HIV and AIDS positive church in Africa is also founded on the ethic of *Ubuntu* that teaches us the very best way to be human is to recognize, respect and welcome the Other.⁸ Ezra Chitando builds on the framework of an HIV positive church by elaborating its multiple theological and ethical bases, but above all, underlining the accountabilities of an HIV positive church. He describes how the HIV positive church can and should become an HIV competent church, in terms of its capacity to respond adequately and effectively to the epidemic.⁹ Chitando describes the HIV competent church as an action-oriented body with "sharp minds."¹⁰ He holds that "African churches need friendly feet to journey with individuals and communities living with HIV and AIDS, warm hearts to demonstrate compassion, and anointed hands to effect healing."¹¹ **This article builds on these on-going theological developments to describe the character, theology, ethic and mission of the HIV positive church as characterised by a listening, vulnerable, healing, compassionate, woman and child-friendly institution, that remembers those who died of AIDS and lives positively in the resurrection agenda of birthing and nurturing just societies.**

⁴ The very earliest response in a form of Consultative study group resulted in the book, WCC, *Facing AIDS: The Challenge, the Churches' Response: A WCC Study Document* (Geneva, WCC, 1997), a second milestone was the drafting of *The Action Plan* in 2002 and the formation of Ecumenical HIV/AIDS Initiative (EHAIA) which facilitated the implementation of the latter amongst African churches and the global ecumenical family.

⁵ African HIV and AIDS theology was generated by various scholars at different places, but the bulk of it was generated through Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative (EHAIA); The Circle of Concerned Women Theologians and The International Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Affected by AIDS (INERELA+).

⁶ Gideon Byamugisha, et. al. *Is the Body of Christ?* volume.

⁷ See Susanne Rappmann, "The Body of Christ has HIV," in Goran Gunner, ed. *Vulnerability, Churches and HIV* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2007), 24-32.

⁸ For details discussions of *ubuntu*, see "The Primacy of Ubuntu in African Ethics," in Munyaradzi Felix Murove, *African Ethics*, 61-110.

⁹ Chitando, *Living With Hope*, Volume 1.

¹⁰ Chitando, *Acting in Hope*, 1.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 1.

As an HIV and AIDS Positive church, the African church does its mission by choosing to identify with the Other, who is vulnerable, who is marginalized, stigmatized, discriminated and oppressed. To be an HIV positive church is to centre the Other, to hear the voice of the Other, for the prophetic voice of the church stands a much better chance by listening to the voice of the Other amongst us.¹² The Other are those among us who live with HIV in their bodies, in their families, in their communities and nations. They are the least of these who constitute the face of Christ amongst us. The HIV positive church carries out its mission in of healing the world as the wounded bride of Christ. She lives with the deadly virus upon her body and bears the marks of its opportunistic infections. She has experienced stigma and discrimination in her own home and among her family members. She is a church that knows suffering, death, grief. She is an orphaned and caregiving grandmother, and a midwife for a positive life. She embodies the least of these (Matt 25:31-46).

The HIV and AIDS positive African church is therefore a listening church. Through the stories and voices of the Other, the HIV and AIDS positive church is critically aware that most of our theologies, ethics, structures and institutions have severe limitations in guarding the human dignity of all, especially our most vulnerable members. The HIV and AIDS positive mission is characterized by its commitment to ensuring that the Other is not subsumed under ethical systems that exclude her/his interests. The HIV positive church identifies, with the marginalized, not so that they can speak for the oppressed, but so that they can make the church a space where the entire marginalized people can be heard and listened to. It is a space where the stories of the oppressed can be told and heard; a place where they can articulate their dreams for liberation and implement them. The HIV and AIDS positive church has read the apocalyptic text and understood that the capacity of the church to preach a liberating salvation is dependent on hearing the prophetic voice of the Other. According to Gideon Byamugisha, the stories of PLWHA have shown the church that we need to dispense with SSDDIM.¹³ Gideon Byamugisha as SSDDIM, that is, Stigma, Shame, Denial, Discrimination, Inaction and Mis-action.¹⁴

To be an HIV positive church is to lives with the virus in its body. It is to understand and work and carry out its mission through exposure. According to Don Messer, “the starting point of this mission is admitting that ultimately we are all HIV-positive: As long as we deny our own vulnerability and risk ... “then we best step aside.”¹⁵ Messer underlines that, “by accepting that we are all HIV positive, we affirm both the sovereignty of God and our solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Christ.”¹⁶ To be an HIV positive church that lacks immunity is, therefore, to be that body that is equipped to bear and catch every infection that comes around, and to be in a constant fight against opportunistic infections. An HIV positive church

¹² See World Vision, *Champions of Hope: A Collection of Short Stories* (World Vision International, 2009), collection of stories of People Living With HIV and AIDS, documenting their struggles, challenges and opportunities; also Anne Koblanck, *A Few More Days: A Story of a Young Woman Living with HIV in Botswana* (SAFIDS: SIDA, 2005).

¹³ Gideon Byamugisha, “Reconstruction of ‘Mission Dei’ in the Context of HIV,” in Byamugisha, et. al. *The Body of Christ*, 130.

¹⁴ Gideon Byamugisha, “Reconstruction of ‘Mission Dei’ in the Context of HIV,” in Byamugisha, et. al. *Is the Body of Christ*, 128-144.

¹⁵ See Don Messer, *Breaking the Conspiracy of Silence: Christian Churches and the Global AIDS Crisis* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 27-38.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

is thus forced to be unsettled and unsettling body of Christ. Constant rethinking, evaluation and monitoring becomes integral for its survival. An HIV positive church has journeyed along the Damascus road, where harsh light struck its eyes and it heard God calling “Church! Church! why are you persecuting me?” just when the church thought it was labouring and defending the interests of God! Irony of ironies! The church thought it knew that every person is made in God’s image and how to love one’s neighbour. It thought it had received grace and knew how to receive a stranger as well as to prophetically defend justice in God’s Earth community. The church thought it had strong protective men and moral families that protect children and women. But now the church has been exposed. An HIV positive church accepts that harsh light that has fallen upon its eyes—highlighting that its structures and institutions, policies, theologies and ethics are based on faulty and sinful foundations that betray the quality of life on God’s Earth.

The today’s HV positive church therefore knows better. Harsh light has brought the church to a place of acknowledgement that its mission needs to work for a holistic liberation. The apocalyptic text has revealed that social oppressions are interconnected and that Christian salvation should handle all forms of oppressions, exclusions, marginalization, anthropocentrism, poverty, patriarchy, racism, gender-based violence, heteronormativity, international economic injustice oppression, youth and child disempowerment, marginalisation of people with disability. The church has been shown that to proclaim the gospel of liberation and transformation, the salvation of the gospel of Christ must address all forms of oppressions. The church needs to seek and work for ethical structures and communities that enable individuals to exercise their moral agency and to live out their salvation in Christ. According to Gideon Byamugisha, an HIV positive church should seek to SAVE, that is, promote, “Safer practices; Access to treatment and Nutrition; Voluntary, routine dogma-free counselling and testing and Empowerment of children, youths, women, families, communities and nations living with, vulnerable to, at risk of and affected by HIV and AIDS.”¹⁷

An HIV and AIDS positive church is a healing community. The African worldview believes that being healthy is to occupy affirming relations within family, community, workplace, the environment and the divine space. The African and global church as a whole, has received further revelation that communities that do not give human dignity and empowerment to all its members are deadly societies. The HIV and AIDS apocalyptic text has underlined that healing is the capacity to see the image of God in every member of our society and to work for the recognition all members of our worlds in all levels of society as well as to birth and nurture structures of justice at all levels of our communities, nations and global village. Such a healing church no longer discriminate against any of its members on the basis of gender, race, class, caste, sexuality, ethnicity, age or disability. A church that still harbours patriarchy, racism, ageism, classism, caste system, heteronormativity, ethnocentrism and discrimination on the bases of physical challenge in its message, structures, policies and ethics is a disease-spreading body. The HIV and AIDS apocalyptic text underlines that healing is the capacity to ensure that every member of our society is given the space to flourish in this our divine Earthly home. An HIV positive church subscribes to the ethic of compassion as it seeks to be in transformative solidarity to bring about healing. The compassionate acts of the HIV and AIDS positive church seek to midwife justice for all and it

¹⁷ Byamugisha, et. al. *Is the Body of Christ*, 240.

moves through transformative solidarity. Consequently, J. P Health-Mokgethi holds that “God has allowed HIV to heal the Church, to force us to become Christian.”¹⁸

*The HIV and AIDS positive church is also a woman and children positive church.*¹⁹ Such a church no longer co-habits with patriarchy nor does it seek to forge ecumenism on the basis of sacrificing the humanity of women on the patriarchal altar. It is a church that recognizes that the African church is a woman church in numbers. A woman and child positive church recognizes that women are the church and the church is the bride of Christ. It recognizes that African women embody the face of the least of these. As Brigalia Bam points out,

the first challenge to mention here is that women bear the brunt of all crisis that African nations are faced with —HIV/AIDS, Poverty, War, Violence, Genocide— hits women hardest. In this sense, African women are the bearers of the cross alongside the crucified Lord. The first challenge facing churchwomen in Africa is all the challenges facing the continent put together.²⁰

As the face of the least of these, African women in our churches are Christ among us. Accordingly, a woman and child positive church carries out its mission by recognizing that African women embody the performance of hospitality, healing and compassion among us. They embody *Ubuntu*. As Mercy Oduyoye points out, the ethics of an African mother are supreme and the mother is supreme. According to Oduyoye “women in Africa exercise motherhood against all odds, the quality of sense of duty and fulfilment and achievement that must go with determination to see another person become human, cannot be associated with poverty of understanding about the value of humanity.”²¹ Oduyoye thus insists that African mothers are “co-creators with God and imitators of God’s management of creation.”²² Consequently, Nyambura Njoroge exhorts us that “from here on, as we preach the good news in the whole world, we will do better to remember HER story and to build on her legacy of compassionate deeds.”²³

The HIV Positive Church carries out its mission in the world by remembering those who died in the HIV and AIDS storm. It remembers those who suffered long and died waiting for medication. It remembers those who died alone stigmatized and discriminated against by family, friends and neighbours. It remembers those who could not even dare to tell their stories and those who dared to tell their stories. It remembers those who died, feeling condemned for immorality and those who received compassion from their friends and family. It remembers the children who were born with HIV and did not have access to

¹⁸ J. P. Heath, “HIV and Related Stigma: Living With the Experience,” in UNAIDS, *A Report of a Theological Workshop*, 31.

¹⁹ See Nyambura Njoroge, “Preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and Tell Her Story,” in Ezra Chitando and Sophia Chirongoma, eds. *Justice not Silence: Churches Facing Sexual and Gender-based Violence* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2014), 17-34, an excellent essay on women, children and people with disabilities in the HIV and AIDS context.

²⁰ Brigalia Bam, “Women and the Church in (South) Africa: Women are the Church in (South) Africa,” In Isabel A Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, eds, *On Being Church: African Women’s Voices and Visions* (Geneva: WCC, 2005), 8-15,

²¹ Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, 58.

²² *Ibid*, 62.

²³ Njoroge, “Preach the Gospel,” 31.

medication and the stigma they faced and the love they received, or the love they did not receive. It remembers the efforts of volunteers, activists, planners, care-givers, donors and policy makers for standing in the gap. All their stories, told and untold, remain a testimony, calling for the creation of life-affirming structures, institutions, theologies and ethics in our quest to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ for healing and transformation. The HIV and AIDS positive church ensures that those who died did not die in vain. It remembers. It heals memories. It commemorates. It is a church that wears the red ribbon, a church that celebrates HIV and AIDS World Day in all the days of its year. It ensures that their lives can continue to bring salvation for the living. The HIV and AIDS positive church recognizes that the dead are the living dead and that the living are the dead living. Together with Christ they urge us, to be in the ministry of creating healing relationships, communities and nations; to be into the multiplication of compassion, healing, justice, grace and love. These ethical commitments to build justice-loving communities- through listening to the Other who has been marginalized among us—should be the basis for being church and for carrying out our vision of building “a Christ healed Africa.”

To be an HIV positive church is, therefore, to remain positive; to live in hope and work for hope in our missional calling to build a Christ-healed Africa. It is to subscribe to ethics of positive living. It is to bear the hope for life. It is to insist on the journey of birthing, co-creating with God and midwifing the process of birthing life with God. It is to subscribe to the ethic of resurrection in our mission to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ for healing and transformation. The ethic of resurrection calls for commitment to resisting all forces of death that negates life and reduces its quality. An HIV positive church mission work is therefore committed to working towards birthing qualitative life among its members, communities, nations and in the global village. The HIV positive church knows that to preach and bear the good news of the liberating salvation, the church cannot work in isolation, for the church remains in the world and it will not be taken out of the world (John 17:15). It must work with other stakeholders in their particular locality, nation and within the global communion. Networking, collaboration and ecumenism are the hallmarks of an HIV positive church. The HIV positive church thus lives in the resurrection power, seeking to perform multiple resurrection acts against persisting opportunistic infections in our communities; against oppressive structures and theologies that mar life on God’s beautiful Earth. The resurrection power of Christ is the energizing spirit that refreshes an HIV Positive church to maintain its prophetic voice; to remain in perpetual search of healing and justice and in transformative solidarity with the Other.

Towards a New Heaven and Earth

The apocalyptic event of the HIV and AIDS epidemic has revealed ethical deficits in all levels of our societies: local, national and global. It has revealed and underlined to us that our mission should seek to heal all broken relationship that deny people their God given dignity, there by denying them good health. The apocalyptic text has thus underlined the imperative to birth a new heaven and new Earth in our missional activities. Like John of the book of Revelation, we have seen the horrors of oppressive dragons in the HIV and AIDS era and similarly we need to see the new Earth and God, coming out of heaven to dwell with us. During the thirty-five years of HIV and AIDS, numerous ecumenical conferences, workshops, seminars, consultations were held to address our ethical deficits and to birth new communities, structures, policies, theologies, economic and international relations that are

welcoming, nurturing, healing and compassionate, where individuals and communities will be empowered moral agents within their worlds. It was revealed to us that healing should heal all the relationships that our members occupy. It was revealed to us that we need to be a Ubuntu churches, whose identity is and can only be expressed by welcoming, affirming, empowering and caring for the Other The HIV and AIDS era was thus a missional moment that necessitated the imagination of something new. A theological base was needed to midwife the birth of a welcoming, compassionate and healing church, communities, nations and global village. On listening to the voices of those among us living with HIV and AIDS, we are led to see an HIV positive church and God, coming out of heaven, coming down to dwell with us on Earth. By naming and recognizing ourselves as an HIV positive church, we seek to take the stigmata amongst ourselves and structures, to close ranks, to make no room between us and them—to welcome Christ among us, as we commit to continuous process of midwifing healing spaces for, and with, all members of our communities.

¹ M. W. Dube and M. Mokgwathisi, *Module 2: African Religions*. Gaborone: University of Botswana, 2001, p.67.

² M. W. Dube, Divining Ruth for International Relations, p. 181. In M.W. Dube, eds. *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*. Atlanta: SBL, 2001.