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OPINION

Leaders of Faith in the Fight against HIV

We need the Black Church

BY DR. MARJORIE INNOCENT

Black Churches are more than places of worship. They are the vibrant hearts of the African-American community that bring the Gospel into our lives, inspire faith, grace, love and mercy and foster a deep commitment to service.

For centuries, Black Churches and faith leaders have been at the forefront of the struggle for civil rights, including voting rights and the right to a quality education. And we need the Black Church's leadership for another adversary: HIV.

Make no mistake: Our nation is facing an epidemic that is ravaging our community from coast to coast. Today, HIV affects African Americans more than any other racial or ethnic group in the country. While we represent just 12 percent of the population, we account for 41 percent of people living with HIV in the United States. This is truly unacceptable.

As part of The Black Church & HIV: The Social Justice Imperative initiative, the NAACP asked churches across the nation to preach from the pulpit this month

about HIV as a social justice issue. African Americans must fully



acknowledge the scope of this epidemic and recognize the hundreds of thousands of brothers and sisters it has taken from us. In fact,

to take positive action to end the HIV epidemic, especially in our communities.

Overall, about one in 20 African-American men and one in 48 African-American women will be diagnosed with HIV during their lifetimes; and 44 percent of all new HIV infections are among African Americans. This crisis is not just about public and community

create The Black Church & HIV initiative to develop a national network of African-American faith leaders who will address the disproportionate impact of HIV on Black Americans.

The NAACP is committed to helping enlist faith leaders from around the country to break the stigma surrounding this disease, engage in meaningful conversa-

2018, our goal is to conduct 45 faith leader trainings in the 30 cities most highly-impacted by HIV, obtain proactive resolutions from historically Black mainline denominations and integrate HIV as a social justice issue into required curricula in predominantly African-American theological seminaries.

Thus far, we've reached more than 1,500 pastors. But we need hundreds more before we can have the kind of transformative impact necessary to save us from continued, but avoidable, devastation and advance us closer to better health and true justice for our community.

As someone whose faith is central to her life, I ask our shepherds-our faith leaders-in the African-American community to grasp this unique opportunity to have a significant, positive impact in the fight against HIV.

We must break the silence about the dangers of HIV and the scope of the epidemic, educate our communities about prevention and advocacy and stop the growth of this disease once and for all. With the commitment of our faith leaders, I believe this is a fight we can win.

Dr. Marjorie Innocent serves as the Senior Director of Health Programs at the NAACP.

The NAACP is committed to helping enlist faith leaders from around the country to break the stigma surrounding this disease, engage in meaningful conversation and education with their congregants, provide compassionate support and spiritual guidance to those living with HIV, and encourage Black Churches to take action through a social justice lens.

we account for more than half of deaths attributed to HIV/AIDS according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Like many who grew up in the Black Church, I look to my pastor for guidance in my faith and all paths of life. It is vital that faith leaders take the lead in this fight, committing to educate, engage and motivate their congregations

health: It's about social justice and institutionalized racism.

The numbers are deeply disturbing but not surprising. Such is the scale of the epidemic that nearly all African Americans have a friend, family member, colleague or acquaintance that is impacted by HIV. I am no exception.

That's why in 2011 the NAACP partnered with Gilead Sciences to

tion and education with their congregants, provide compassionate support and spiritual guidance to those living with HIV, and encourage Black Churches to take action through a social justice lens.

In 2013, we took an additional step to further the impact and reach of our efforts by making a Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) "Commitment to Action." By

Private Prison of Cruelty, Greed and Indifference

Inflicting suffering for profit

BY ANDREW MOSS

If you take I-15

about two hours north from Los Angeles, heading into the high desert of San Bernardino County, you'll reach a for-profit federal detention facility called the Adelanto Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Processing Center.

The center's named for the neighboring town of Adelanto, which means "advancement" or "progress" in Spanish, and it's not an inappropriate title for a town founded a century ago by the inventor of the Hotpoint Electric Iron. But the name now carries a rather different set of associations due to the ICE facility's presence there.

This year, eight asylum seekers from Central American countries who had been "detained" (imprisoned) at this facility went on hunger strike to affirm the



right to asylum as well as to protest excessively high bail, substandard food and medical care, and other abuses. Three detainees at Adelanto have died since March, one found hanging in his cell on March 22, the other two suffering from serious medical issues that, advocates say, had been inadequately addressed at the facility.

This year's protest follows a previous hunger strike in 2015, when 26 detainees protested prolonged imprisonment and excessive bail while awaiting resolution of their asylum cases. Earlier that year, over two dozen members of Congress wrote a letter to the Justice Department and ICE officials, citing numerous cases of medical neglect and calling for a halt to the facility's expansion. More recently, an immigrants' advocacy organization called CIVIC (Community Initiatives for Visiting Inmates in Confinement) issued a report asserting that Adelanto had the third highest number of sexual assault complaints

of all U.S. immigration detention facilities.

Last year, the Obama administration ordered a phasing out of private federal prison facilities like Adelanto. Citing an Inspector General's report that faulted the prisons on issues of safety and security, and noting a decline in federal inmates, Deputy Attorney General Sally Q. Yates stated in a memo that the private prisons "compare poorly" to public facilities: "they simply do not provide the same level of correctional services, programs, and resources," she said, and "they do not save substantially on costs."

All this changed with Donald Trump's inauguration as president. The new Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, reversed the Obama administration's initiative to phase out the private facilities, and the stock prices of private correction companies like the GEO Group, which runs Adelanto, and CoreCivic, went up substantially (about 80 percent for GEO and 120 percent for CoreCivic since the election).

Once again there is official

support for the unholy union of two policies: the criminalization of anyone "without papers," including those seeking asylum from terror elsewhere, and the affixing of dollar signs to incarcerated immigrant bodies. The more bodies that can be captured and held, the higher the proceeds for prison companies and the higher the earnings for shareholders.

As I read various commentaries on these developments, I was struck by one comment in particular. Terry Dwyer, an analyst with KDP Investment Advisors, was quoted in the New York Times as saying, "The deportation crackdown is doing very good things for these companies. On a personal level, it leaves a sour taste in my mouth, but I guess business is business."

Business is business. Inflicting suffering for profit may once again be sanctioned as official policy, but the new regime has prompted resistance. Aside from hunger strikes inside the walls and activists' sympathetic protests outside, there have been movements to restrict or elimi-

nate the prisons altogether.

In California, for example, the legislature last month approved a budget measure preventing any privately run facilities from expanding the number of beds for inmates involved in civil immigration proceedings, and it now requires the state's Department of Justice to audit the facilities in order to ensure that they provide proper food, medical care, and access to legal assistance. More fundamentally, a group called the Detention Watch Network, together with MoveOn.org, has begun a petition drive calling for defunding the private prisons altogether.

So what is Adelanto? Until the walls and criminalized borders fall away, it will remain a deep stain – a composite image of cruelty, greed, and indifference – that we will see if we're willing to gaze squarely into the mirror of American self-identity.

Andrew Moss, syndicated by PeaceVoice, is an emeritus professor at the California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, where he taught in Nonviolence Studies for 10 years.