WHY US?
LEFT BEHIND AND DYING

Video Curriculum Modules

Lesson 9: HIV — The Church

LEARNING WAS NEVER LIKE THIS

Lesson 9: The Church

Standards:

Health:

2.12.1

2.12.2

2.12.7

2.12.8

7.12.1

8.12.1

8.12.3

Science:

Skills Practiced and Gained:

1.1—1.7

2.1—2.5

Overview

The Black Church has always been the core of African American communities. However, the Black Church has been very slow in responding to the HIV and AIDS epidemic in African American communities. Many people including those in the church associate HIV with promiscuity and homosexuality—things that most religions consider to be sins. In some cases, those in the church make no apologies for this lack of action in the community. In other cases, those in the church are making concerted efforts not only to change their rhetoric but more importantly to outreach to and support community members impacted by HIV and AIDS.

we begin to change our attitudes about HIV/AIDS and the people living with it. Regrettably the church has perpetuated punitive, discriminative, unjust and intolerant attitudes.

Key Concepts

Role of the church in the spread of HIV /AIDS

Impact of religious stigmas

Social determinants of health

Changing views held by the church and communities

Materials for Activities and Educator Background Knowledge

Reading 9.1 is a reading on church influence during slavery, during the Civil Rights movement, and on current day African Americans. You will also need internet access for independent research on Native American concepts of ownership, Asian American myth of the model minority, etc.

Procedure

Part I

View *"The Church"* video module. After viewing the module use the following questions to facilitate group discussion or give the questions as prompts for journal entries.

Discussion / Journal Questions

1) What new information did you gather from the video module?
2) How does the influence of the Black Church contribute to the high rates of HIV/AIDS in African and African American communities?
3) What other questions or comments do you have?

Part II

Several institutions in society influence the norms, beliefs, and behaviors of its members. These institutions include: government, schools, faith organizations, etc. For some groups, certain institutions are more important than others – the church is such an institution for African Americans. Cultural strongholds (institutions, values, and beliefs shared by members of a community) give a community positive as well as negative influences. The following discussion questions allow students/ participants to examine various cultural strongholds and the positive and negative influences they can have on its members.

1) One of the speakers in the video module said, "The Church got us through slavery." Unpacking this statement is important. Discuss:

- What did the speaker mean by this statement?
- What are the benefits of a strong faith community?
- What are the positive influences of the Black church?
  (provide additional clips or readings if the group is unfamiliar)

(*Examples: strong community centers that allow people to come together and coalesce as a group of people that take care of one another; strong sense of shared values that help the community move in a positive direction; a positive outlet for relationships and community as opposed to nightclubs, drugs, gangs, etc.*)

Part II (continued)

2) Discuss some of the challenges and struggles that result from having a strong faith community. What are some negative influences of the Black church?

(*Examples: common belief and teaching that homosexuality is wrong has resulted in the exclusion of certain members of the community; stereotype arises that all Black churches are homophobic; a strong link between HIV/AIDS, homosexuality, sexual activity, and immorality can keep the community from discussing real impacts of the disease on members of the community; etc.*)

3) After discussing the Black Church, broaden the discussion to other cultural strongholds of various groups. Have students/participants critically analyze how cultural strongholds represent positive and negative influences on members of different communities. Students should also distinguish between a cultural stronghold versus a blanket stereotype for all members of a particular group. Break up into small groups to examine different strongholds and share findings in the larger group.

(*Examples of cultural strongholds: Native American beliefs about owning land and other natural resources; US mainstream consumerism and capitalism; Asian American beliefs about academics and achievement; many cultures' beliefs that a woman's role in society is to take care of the home and children; etc.*)

4) After examining various cultural strongholds ask students to discuss the following questions:

- Are there any cultural strongholds that are all positive or all negative?
- Who are the authorities in these strongholds that instill values and beliefs?
- When (if ever) is it justified for members of a group to reject the beliefs of the cultural stronghold?

Closure

Sometimes, members of cultural strongholds feel that they must act from within the norms and values set forth by the institution. As we saw in the video module, some Black homosexuals feel that they have been "beat up" by the church's beliefs. Some homosexuals also feel that they must hide or deny their sexual orientation. And, as voiced by one of the youth, challenging the pastor did not seem like a possibility. Ask students to discuss or journal the following:

1) What are some of your community's cultural strongholds? What are the beliefs, norms, and values of these strongholds?

2) What do you like or what do you gain by acting within the guidelines of your cultural strongholds?

3) What do you dislike about or how do you feel limited by the guidelines of your cultural strongholds?

4) Does understanding the influences of cultural strongholds change your thoughts about how you might act? Why or why not?

Black Church
(adapted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_church)
8/5/11

The term black church or African-American church refers to Christian churches that minister to predominantly African-American congregations in the United States. While some black churches belong to predominantly African-American denominations, such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), many black churches are members of predominantly white denominations, such as the United Church of Christ (which developed from the Congregational Church of New England.)

In the Great Awakening of the late 18th century, Evangelical Baptist and Methodist preachers traveled throughout the South. They appealed directly to slaves, and numerous people converted. Blacks found opportunities to have active roles in new congregations, especially in the Baptist Church, where slaves were appointed as leaders and preachers. (They were excluded from such roles in the Anglican or Episcopal Church.) As they listened to readings, slaves developed their own interpretations of the Scriptures and found inspiration in stories of deliverance, such as the Exodus out of Egypt.

In plantation areas, slaves organized underground churches and hidden religious meetings, the "invisible church", where slaves were free to mix evangelical Christianity with African beliefs and African rhythms. They turned Wesleyan Methodist hymns into spirituals. The underground churches provided psychological refuge from the white world. The spirituals gave the church members a secret way to communicate and, in some cases, to plan rebellion.

Free blacks in both northern and southern cities formed their own congregations and churches before the end of the 18th century. They organized independent black congregations and churches to practice religion apart from white oversight. Along with white churches opposed to slavery, free blacks in Philadelphia provided aid and comfort to slaves who escaped and helped all new arrivals adjust to city life.

After emancipation, Northern churches founded by free blacks, as well as those of predominantly white denominations, sent missions to the South to minister to newly freed slaves, including to teach them to read and write.

The postwar years were marked by a separatist impulse as blacks exercised the right to move and gather beyond white supervision or control. They developed black churches, benevolent societies, fraternal orders and fire companies. In some areas they moved from farms into towns, as in middle Tennessee, or to cities that needed rebuilding, such as Atlanta. Black churches were the focal points of black communities, and their members' quickly seceding from white churches demonstrated their desire to manage their own affairs independently of white supervision. It also showed the prior strength of the "invisible church" hidden from white eyes.

Black preachers provided leadership, encouraged education and economic growth, and were often the primary link between the black and white communities. The black church established and/or maintained the first black schools and encouraged community members to fund these schools and other public services. For most black leaders, the churches always were connected to political goals of advancing the race. There grew to be a tension between black leaders from the North and people in the South who wanted to run their churches and worship in their own way.

Black churches held a leadership role in the American Civil Rights Movement. Their history as a centers of strength for the black community made them natural leaders in this moral struggle. In addition they had often served as links between the black and white worlds. Notable minister-activists of the 1950s and 1960s included Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph David Abernathy, Bernard Lee, Fred Shuttlesworth, Wyatt Tee Walker and C.T. Vivian.

The black church continues to be a source of support for members of the African-American community. When compared to American churches as a whole, black churches tend to focus more on social issues such as poverty, gang violence, drug use, prison ministries and racism. A study found that black Christians were more likely to have heard about health care reform from their pastors than were white Christians. Black churches are typically very conservative on sexuality issues, such as homosexuality.

One formalization of theology based on themes of black liberation is the Black liberation theology movement. Its origins can be traced to July 31, 1966, when an ad hoc group of

Although black urban neighborhoods in cities that have deindustrialized may have suffered from civic disinvestment, with lower quality schools, less effective policing and fire protection, there are institutions that help to improve the physical and social capital of black neighborhoods. In black neighborhoods the churches may be important sources of social cohesion. For some African Americans the kind of spirituality learned through these churches works as a protective factor against the corrosive forces of poverty and racism. Churches may also do work to improve the physical infrastructure of the neighborhood. Churches in Harlem have undertaken real estate ventures and renovated burnt-out and abandoned brownstones to create new housing for residents. Churches have fought for the right to operate their own schools in place of the often inadequate public schools found in many black neighborhoods.