



A Tale of **Lost Opportunities**

Marta grew up on the tough streets of New York City in the 1970s and 80s. Her family had always been members of the Pentecostal church. This is her story as told by her sister.

My name is Elizabeth Diaz, and I have two sisters, Josey and Marta. Marta was a drug addict and at 29 she was diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. She had seen hard times and was trying to find her way back to the Lord. Several years passed before she began attending and participating in my mother's church. Marta finally felt that she had found a place where she was accepted and loved, for the first time in many years she was happy and full of hope. One evening the pastor made an unexpected visit to my mother's home, where he informed my mother that the deacons had recently called him into a private meeting to discuss Marta's presence at the church. They expressed concern for the safety of the congregation and their children because Marta had AIDS.

The pastor, while admitting he did not know too much about HIV/AIDS, told my mother that they felt Marta's presence at the church was a serious health threat to the members of the congregation. My sister felt rejected and unwelcome at the church. Marta stopped going to the church, she became isolated and depressed. Many months went by before Marta regained strength to move beyond the pain the church had caused her.

When my sister Josey learned what happened she got involved and made a call to the pastor. She said to him, "There is no way that you prayed before you visited my sister! The one place where she felt safe and accepted for who she was, has now rejected her. Like our family, there are other families in your congregation affected by this disease. You need to get educated and also educate your congregation. You don't get AIDS by hugging, touching or talking."



"My hurt sister Marta never returned to the church. The damage was already done."

Later that evening after Josey's call, the pastor returned to my mother's home. He came to ask for forgiveness. Josey's words touched the pastor deeply. He realized that compassion was what Marta needed. We understood his dilemma and forgave him, but my hurt sister Marta never returned to the church. The damage was already done. My mother was heartbroken but never questioned the pastor's decision. She knew her pastor lacked knowledge of the disease. Marta finally passed away in January of 2004 at the age of 41.

For Latinas, AIDS is the third ranked cause of death. It is the ninth leading cause of death for white women in the same age bracket. With the HIV/AIDS rate for Latinas increasing over the last 10 years, critical questions face the church. What does it mean to get AIDS today? Should our families keep this secret to themselves? How will our churches and faith community brace for this in our communities? How can we support our faith leaders? Whose burden is this?

www.pacto.us

Looking for the latest information and resources on HIV/AIDS in the Hispanic Community? Go to www.pacto.us. This site contains a wealth of information designed to empower individuals and churches in the fight against the disease.

Facts and Resources

Find valuable information about HIV/AIDS in the Hispanic community, and up to date news about what is being done to fight this disease. Get real facts here.

Catch a Vision

Catch a vision from the Rev. Luis Cortés, founder of Esperanza USA, for how the Hispanic Church can take the lead in the HIV/AIDS battle in our Latino Communities.

What You Can Do?

Discover practical ways that you and your church can mobilize members and leaders in your community to take action and make a difference.

National Needs

Learn about the needs of the Hispanic Community on a national level, and then learn about more specific needs in many regional locations.

HIV/AIDS Links

To provide you with as much information as possible, we have created a list of links to Web sites that provide information as well as more ways to get involved.

Take a Stand

Online you can now join thousands of other Hispanic leaders and citizens who have signed El Pacto de Esperanza.

I'm interested in learning more about how Esperanza USA is impacting HIV/AIDS in Hispanic Communities today!

Name _____

Address _____

Day Phone _____

Email: _____

Church (if Applicable) _____

Comments _____

Please mail to: 4261 North 5th St • Philadelphia, PA 19140

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Breaking News!

Esperanza Receives \$500,000 Grant from Senator Frist for HIV/AIDS efforts.

Senator Bill Frist recently awarded Esperanza USA a \$500,000 grant to continue the organization's fight against HIV/AIDS in the Hispanic community. More than \$3 million was raised during a fundraiser through Frist's charitable organization, World of Hope. Over 100 corporations and individuals donated to the cause.

"We are honored that Senator Frist has recognized our efforts and the impact of El Pacto de Esperanza," said Esperanza USA's Rev. Luis Cortés. "These funds will allow us to further our educational and preventative efforts with Hispanic churches throughout the country."

Frist, a physician, has a personal passion for dealing with the disease that has killed 23 million people in the past two decades. HIV/AIDS has the potential to claim the lives of two to three times that number in the next 20 years if major efforts are not made to contain it.

Throw Open the Doors!

Rev. Luis Cortés Speaks Out on AIDS and the Church



Rev. Luis Cortés Jr.

HIV/AIDS is bearing down hard on Latino communities, causing widespread catastrophe and hardship. The latest statistics from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) find that HIV/AIDS is a leading cause of death for Hispanic men, women, and children. The CDC also reports that while Hispanics represent 14 percent of the U.S. population, they accounted for 20 percent of the nation's AIDS cases in 2002.

In response to this health emergency, Nueva Esperanza is working diligently to increase awareness about HIV/AIDS in Hispanic communities and boost support for Hispanic faith-based programs aimed at preventing the further spread of HIV.

Nueva's founder and president, Reverend Luis Cortés, Jr., views HIV/AIDS education and outreach as morally imperative. "God calls on us to feed the hungry, clothe the poor, shelter the homeless and look after the sick," he says.

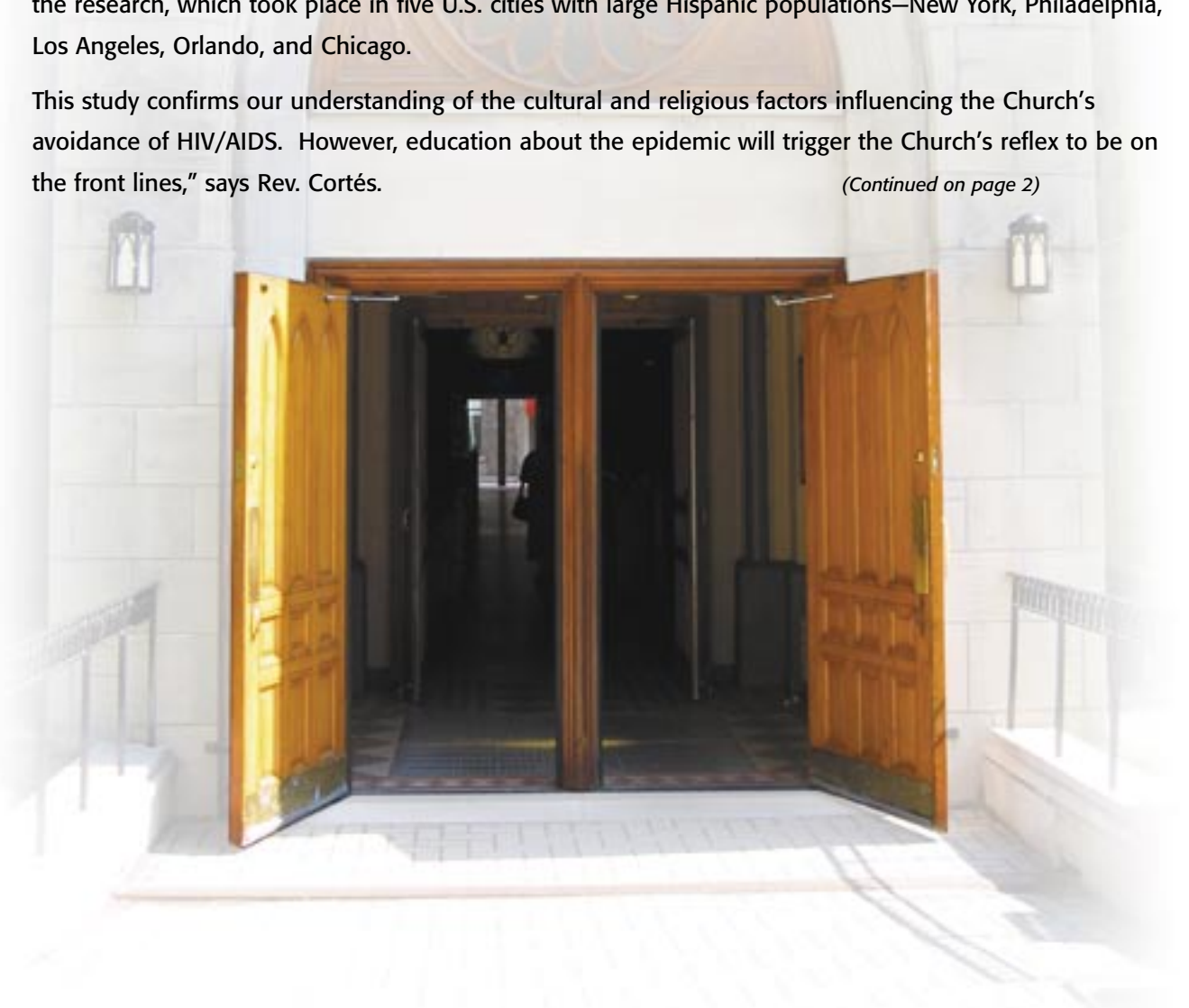
As HIV/AIDS grew from a disease primarily associated with gay white men in the early '80s to an epidemic now devastating communities of color, Luis noticed a disturbing response from the Hispanic Church. "I saw the Church standing on the sidelines as our people were dying of AIDS," says Luis.

The Hispanic Church's inaction around HIV/AIDS prompted Luis to form the Pacto de Esperanza last year. The Pacto is both an agreement and an alliance focused entirely on HIV/AIDS. A number of Hispanic pastors have joined Pacto with a pledge to atone for the Church's historic avoidance of HIV/AIDS.

In addition to the Pacto, Nueva has conducted breakthrough research on how Hispanic faith leaders feel about HIV/AIDS. The research known as the "Pacto Study," was funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and conducted by the Center for the Study of Latino Religion at Notre Dame University. Latino pastors, lay leaders, and community leaders from various denominations participated in the research, which took place in five U.S. cities with large Hispanic populations—New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Orlando, and Chicago.

This study confirms our understanding of the cultural and religious factors influencing the Church's avoidance of HIV/AIDS. However, education about the epidemic will trigger the Church's reflex to be on the front lines," says Rev. Cortés.

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Pioneer of Faith Leads Fight

Bruised Reed Ministry in New York serves as model for nation

by Annabella Roig

Rev. Rosa Julia Caraballo is used to breaking barriers. For the last twenty years, as faith leader, woman and pastor of Bruised Reed Ministry in New York

City, she served those afflicted with and affected by HIV/AIDS virus in the Bronx when it was being challenged and ignored in the Church. She was there, providing grief support to families, and learning and teaching others on self care, and finding Scripture to support their walk in the Lord, under this burden.

Recently, she broke another barrier with the publication of her book "Covenant

of Hope: A Woman's Healing Journey in the AIDS Epidemic." In it she provides a forum for families to give witness about their journey and struggle with the disease and their faith at the

time. She also serves up a manual for people to understand the disease, at risk behaviors and the resources out there to get more information. Finally, she provides a section on

grief support using Scripture so that other faith leaders can begin to develop their own pastoral resources for their ministry.

The book is divided in two. There is an English version and in the second half, all the material is translated into Spanish! Dr. Peter Selwyn of the Montefiore Medical Center in New York calls this book "a testament to the ability of the human spirit to survive the most difficult challenges."

With an estimated 900,000 Americans living with HIV/AIDS. We need to educate ourselves in order to make a difference. For the Latino Christian, this book offers an excellent opportunity to do so!



Reverend Caraballo challenges the church to respond to HIV/AIDS with compassion.



Guidelines for HIV/AIDS Caregivers From the book Covenant of Hope

Remain Patient—Provide ministry of comfort and spiritual support for patients alienated from former religious/spiritual traditions. **Don't Judge**—The patients' perspective on death and dying are usually dictated by their cultural and religious beliefs. **Have Compassion**—A concrete understanding of what they believe and who can be involved with these end of life decisions must be understood before handing documents such as a health care proxy or DNR: Do Not Resuscitate/ DNI: Do Not Intubate for them to sign. **Maintain a Presence**—Encouragement of realistic hope. **Always Listen**—Assisting with funeral rites and arrangements, bereavement services for families. **Be Sensitive to Timing**—It is necessary to discuss these documents in detail and involve the family when necessary.

We must be cognizant of the fact that a person's spirituality resides in their soul and our patients aren't physically able to attend or are estranged from their house of worship. With most of our patients it is their negative and positive spiritual experiences that incline them to pursue spirituality in their pain and end of life. Suffering often leads a person to spiritual reevaluation and restoration. Remember these essential elements:

Spirituality—Enhances immune system and assists in healing process. **Prayer**—There are positive therapeutic effects to intercessory prayer. **Comfort**—Ministry of presence, therapeutic touch and spiritual encouragement. **Intervention**—Assists provider in treatment plan, decision making. Important for patient, caregivers, family and friends.

Cortés: Throw Open the Doors!

(continued from front page)

In addition to urging the Hispanic Church to get involved in HIV/AIDS outreach, Luis also has challenged "the HIV/AIDS industry," namely policy makers, foundations, HIV/AIDS organizations, and pharmaceutical companies that manufacture HIV/AIDS drugs, to strengthen its response to the epidemic in Hispanic communities in general and the Hispanic faith community in particular.



Rev. Luis Cortés, Grammy-Award winning recording artist Marcos Witt, and Rev. Danny Cortes present El Pacto de Esperanza at the prayer breakfast.

"Although HIV/AIDS heavily affects Latinos, the HIV/AIDS prevention industry has not supported my community's fight at the level

it ought to," argues Luis. He adds, "Federal officials have promised dollars but have failed to deliver. In the meantime, fathers and mothers are dying and children are left without parents. The death rates and human suffering demand action not lip service." Without a doubt, Luis is impatient with rhetoric, preferring action that leads to better health outcomes for the nation's largest community of color.

In his keynote address at the Pacto de Esperanza's dinner in June, Luis urged leaders from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the private sector to not only increase HIV/AIDS funding in Hispanic communities but also to collaborate with community- and faith-based groups that serve Hispanics. "Historically, the HIV/AIDS prevention industry has relegated the Hispanic community to the back of the bus," he said.

Luis finds disparity intolerable. "More so than any other institution, the Hispanic Church is positioned to connect with Hispanics and influence their behavior. We are Biblical people guided by a theology that calls on us to be compassionate".

To this man of faith, combating HIV/AIDS in the Hispanic community is not rocket science. "Give the Church the resources it needs to get in the fight and win. As part of the community's heart and soul, we can develop

Leadership Considers the Latino Church and HIV/AIDS

"When the test came back and they found out he was sick, they just got rid of him." That is what a faith leader study said when asked about his church's response to AIDS.

In 2004, Esperanza USA documented the experience of leaders within the Hispanic Church in dealing with dilemmas that HIV/AIDS presents in their lives and pastoral work. In a series of focus groups, conducted by Notre Dame University's Center for Latino Religious Studies, issues of fear, shock, panic, confusion and emotional devastation, were presented and discussed. Dr. Edwin Hernandez presented the findings of this study during the National Hispanic Prayer Breakfast.

Doubts about the extent to which faith in God can protect people from AIDS described many pastors' and church leaders' first experience with AIDS. Pastors outlined difficulty around the great tension that reportedly exists between organized religion and the gay community. People in the study talked about how some churches have had to alter their theology to be more responsive to people living with AIDS.

The study also shows that many thought that

congregations should embrace AIDS victims and bring God in their redemption. They agreed that apathy towards the AIDS epidemic was a social and collective sin.



Dr. Edwin Hernandez of Notre Dame presents the findings of a recent study on AIDS and the Hispanic church.

These leaders also felt that most churches need to take advantage of the opportunities for ministry that deal with the AIDS epidemic and utilize available community resources. The study concluded that church leaders may be poised to develop a holistic AIDS theology and approach to intervention. In addition, leaders should become more politically active to seek government funding.

Walking In Another's Shoes

Dealing with the Stigma of HIV/AIDS in the Hispanic Church



By Ramon Gadea, MD

*"So God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him."
Genesis 1:27*

What does this mean to the average Christian? To me, it means that no matter how infirm or broken we are, we still are bearers of his image. All human life is valuable to God and deserves to be respected. This verse informs my medical practice and all I do as a Christian.

I have seen all manner of HIV patients in my experience as a Christian HIV medical specialist, practicing in Philadelphia. One of my most memorable experiences was with a patient that I will call Bob. This man was living with AIDS and his past included heavy drug use and severe behavioral problems. The six months that I shared with Bob until his death were the most significant in affecting my ministry within my medical practice.

As Bob's health condition deteriorated, I was able to get to know his family and work with them in reconciliation and acceptance of his terminal condition. Days before his death,

he reconciled with the Lord and his family. During his funeral the family expressed to me that they had lost all hope with Bob, but as they saw that I treated him with dignity and love, they realized that they too could forgive his drug use and accept his HIV diagnosis. This was a very powerful experience for me.

The way we treat God's Image Bearer reflects our attitude towards God. As a church, we need to be leaders and examples of compassion for our families dealing with a relative with AIDS as well as those that have the disease. We love humanity "because He first loves us."

Ramon Gadea is the Medical Director of the Esperanza



The Hard Facts about HIV/AIDS and the Hispanic Community

2nd The second leading cause of death for Hispanic men age 35-44 is HIV/AIDS

4th The fourth leading cause of death for Hispanic women age 35-44 is HIV/AIDS

80% 80% of reported AIDS cases among women are Black and Hispanic

80% 80% of reported AIDS cases among Hispanics are men

23% Of all pediatric AIDS cases, 23% are found in Hispanic children

19% 19% of all adult and adolescent AIDS cases reported, were among Hispanics

1,833 Of all AIDS cases reported among young people, over 1,800 were Hispanic

The above information was provided by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Center for Health Statistics.