

Introduction

WHY WE WROTE THIS BOOK

By the mid-1980s we—the global community—knew what the HIV virus does and the ways it spreads from one person to another. Public health experts knew in what parts of the world and in which communities it had become resident. There was hope that an AIDS vaccine or a cure would be found, but at the time there was no effective treatment for the disease. With those facts established, medical science didn't need the gift of prophecy to predict a bleak future concerning AIDS. Barring a medical miracle, millions were going to die.

Since then, AIDS has shaped our personal and professional ministries. This book reflects the lessons we've learned from over twenty years of leading teams of people from many nations giving hands, feet and voice to compassion in the face of AIDS. Hundreds of thousands of people affected by AIDS have been touched by Christ's love by thousands of church volunteers who visit, help, teach and counsel in their own communities. The programs developed through churches to prevent AIDS and care for families affected by AIDS have been recognized for their professional excellence as well as the compassion that animates them.

As Christians, none of us can confront AIDS without also confronting core issues that define us. We confront our own attitudes and actions regarding sex, sexual behaviors and people who are diagnosed with AIDS. We confront the structural evils that mold the environment in which HIV flourishes. We confront the conflicts between grace and judgment that influence our cultures as well as our own character. We confront the role and power of the church in the world. We who are Westerners eventually confront our deeply





held cultural belief that solving any global problem is just a question of will, strategy and resources.

We've written this book first of all to provoke these confrontations as we describe AIDS in the context of life and hands-on interventions. Our reflections are woven into the fabric of the text. We have been deeply changed by AIDS and the issues surrounding it—changes that not only define what we do, but make us who we are.

The church no longer has any choice about whether to respond; we can only decide *how* we will respond. Even though God will not call most of you reading this book into specific AIDS-related ministries, you will nonetheless be shaped by honestly confronting AIDS. As you read, we invite you to encounter God and yourself.

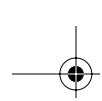
We've also written this book for Christians and churches who are exposed to the reality of AIDS firsthand or who may wish to be involved through ministry. As a result of reading this book, we hope that you will examine your expectations and attitudes about AIDS-related ministry. As you encounter the enormity of the AIDS disaster, we hope you will be humbled in the face of this disease and that this will constantly drive you back to God for power and wisdom, and to others for help and discernment. We hope that you will determine not to go it alone in ministry but to work hand in hand with many others—even with people with whom you may disagree—in confronting issues of sexuality, HIV and AIDS.

We hope that this book will inform the ministry approaches and strategies of the ever-increasing number of churches and agencies that are engaging in AIDS-related activities.

Finally, we hope that those who read this book will commit to excellence in ministry—a recognition that doing good demands not only passion and power but also discipline and learning.

Three additional features of this book will help you in your personal and corporate response to AIDS. First, at the end of each chapter, personal reflection and action questions will help you define your response to AIDS. The reflection questions guide you in how you will apply the content of the





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chapter to yourself, and the action questions guide you in how you will respond toward others. A study guide at the end of the book, designed primarily for group discussion, will help you integrate the content of the book into a more comprehensive approach. Finally, an extensive list of resources, also at the end of the book, will help support your continued reflections, further study and response.

As the apostle John approached the end of his ministry, he wrote to those who had become precious to him. "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:18). This is our prayer for those who encounter AIDS and Christ through this book.

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