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**Florida Mobilizes Churches To Fight HIV/AIDS**

*First health department to initiate statewide faith-based efforts for prevention and testing with AME denomination.*

**TALLAHASSEE, Fla.**, -- The Florida Department of Health (DOH) announced its newest statewide initiative mobilizing churches and other faith-based organizations to fight against HIV/AIDS. As the newest initiative of the *We Make the Change (WMTC)* campaign, DOH has partnered with faith leaders throughout Florida's minority communities to perform HIV testing and education within the church. Florida is the first state to establish a formal, faith-based HIV/AIDS prevention network.

The Bureau of HIV/AIDS has partnered with the Eleventh Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church to identify at least one AME church in each of Florida's 67 counties as an HIV testing site or test location. The Bureau has also partnered with the General Baptist State Convention to establish an HIV ministry with every church affiliated with the association. Currently, the faith network consists of nearly 150 churches statewide.

The Department of Health will work closely with faith leaders to increase awareness of HIV and AIDS in the faith community, reduce the stigma associated with HIV and AIDS within the church and promote the importance of HIV testing and knowing your HIV status.

"The goal of the initiative is to raise HIV awareness within the faith community," said Bishop McKinley Young, Presiding Prelate for the 11th Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. "The church plays a critical role. In some cases, it is the only place that individuals will go to get tested and access HIV/AIDS health-related information."

*We Make the Change* uses community faith-based events for HIV education. Local HIV prevention teams participate in church conferences, concerts, and other events throughout the state.

The faith-based initiative is the fifth initiative developed by the Bureau of HIV/AIDS targeting Florida's minority communities. The *We Make the Change* campaign also includes Stop the Spread, SOS (Sistas Organizing to Survive), LUCES (Latinas Unidas Contra el SIDA), and Man Up.

For more information visit [www.WeMakeTheChange.com](http://www.WeMakeTheChange.com).

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