

Good Catholics Use Condoms

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His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI
Apostolic Palace
VATICAN CITY

Your Holiness:

Today, we are writing to you in solidarity with the approximately 40 million people living with HIV and AIDS and out of concern for the more than 15 million children who have been orphaned.

We know you share our concern and have supported the many Catholic health and social service agencies, who have treated those with HIV and AIDS. In so many ways, the Catholic community has been an international leader in providing compassionate, nondiscriminatory treatment to those living with HIV and AIDS, and we applaud those efforts.

We write to you today to express our support for your decision announced 23 April 2006 for senior theologians and scientists to prepare a document discussing the use of condoms as a means of preventing the transmission of HIV. But we urge you to move forward quickly to set new guidelines for the prevention of this disease that would enable all agencies that collaborate with the Catholic community to educate those at risk of the option of using condoms to prevent the transmission of HIV and AIDS and to actually provide condoms to those it serves whose conscience leads them to choose to use them.

For years, Vatican spokespersons and other church officials have made clear the church's moral objections to condoms as a contraceptive. However, the extension of this position to HIV and AIDS prevention has resulted in dangerous practices that have contributed to the spread of HIV and AIDS. There have been public burnings of condoms, gross distortions of the statistics on the efficacy of condoms as a preventive and disregard of the very real human toll of this pandemic by some whose ecclesiastical objections outweigh concern for the common good and the promotion of a culture of life.

Indeed, since you became pope on 19 April 2005, 5.5 million people have acquired the HIV virus. And 3.7 million people have died of AIDS-related causes.

As people of faith, both Catholic and not, we urge you to pay special attention to those bishops and health care workers who have witnessed the devastation firsthand and who have courageously spoken out in support of the use of condoms to prevent the spread of HIV as a stand for life:

We think their witness demonstrates that a culture of life requires support for a full array of prevention methods, including condoms.

We know that condoms are neither 100 percent effective nor a simple solution to a complex problem. They remain however the only hope for those who are sexually active, either voluntarily or in forced circumstances, such as women who do not have the right to say no to risky sex.

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We believe the world community must offer compassionate quality care to those already infected with HIV/AIDS, as well as fully support integrated prevention programs that incorporate women's empowerment, sexual education, condom counseling and distribution, monogamy and abstinence—without discrimination or stigmatization. We maintain that the most ethical approach to combating HIV and AIDS is a comprehensive and balanced approach that meets the varied needs of all people while upholding scientific and medical integrity. To that end, we believe in and support a comprehensive range of methods by which to stem the spread of this pandemic, such as:

- the ABC method that equally emphasizes abstinence, fidelity and condom use, and
- the SAVE approach that emphasizes safer practices, available medication, voluntary counseling and testing, and empowerment through education.

As concerned and compassionate people of faith, we are bound together by moral and ethical values that call on us to address the global AIDS crisis with compassion and respect for the dignity and conscience of each person. Most of the world's religions have recognized that support for condom education and use freely chosen reflects those moral values. We call on you to bring the Catholic community into this religious consensus and support condom use as an important part of the international strategy to save lives.

We thank you for your consideration.