

Churches Must Move Past Comfort Zone to Fight AIDS

In a high level summit meeting held at the [International AIDS Conference](#) (IAC) in Washington, D.C., Christian groups were urged by high-level speakers to continue to make progress and forge new partnerships beyond their comfort zone in the fight against AIDS.

Hosted by Rick and Kay Warren with Saddleback Church, the event featured a video link with President Barack Obama, former President George W. Bush and an array of U.S. congressional and Christian leaders.

Rick Warren, pastor and founder of Saddleback Church and author of the best-selling book "The Purpose Driven Life," called for the church to be more tolerant.

"We don't agree on hardly anything together but we can work on lots together," he said.

Warren talked of the differences he and IAC speaker Elton John have in approach. "We are worlds apart," he said, "but I said to Elton, 'If you want to stop AIDS and you're serious about it, you must work through the local church. It's everywhere.'"

"The church can do it cheaper and faster than anyone, and we are bigger than the Chinese population," Warren said.

When challenged about the behavior of the LGBT community, Warren encouraged the church to move beyond its comfort zone.

"If anyone wants to end AIDS, I am on your side. I don't have to agree with everything you say or do. I will work with you and I will not insist you change your views. I am often more willing to work with others than they are with me."

"Realizing the dream of an AIDS-free generation is a priority for my

administration,” Obama said. “Our work with the church is critical in the fight against HIV. May God give us the spirit and unity to complete this work we have started.”

Bush, the originator of one of the major funds for HIV drugs, PEPFAR, said, “I am a firm believer in ‘To him to whom much is given will much be required.’ Poor work does not serve our moral interests. Keep up the good work and may God bless you.”

Dave Evans with Food for the Hungry spoke of faith leaders being crucial agents of change and the unique contribution the church can make in bringing comfort, care and being a catalyst for change in its prophetic role.

U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu called for closer contact between the church and those with HIV.

“We used to give money in church to build orphanages; now we need to empty them,” Landrieu said. “We need to give ourselves. I guess there could be 163 million orphans in the world, but there are 2.4 billion Christians. It’s enough to care for them all! The only question is ‘Why aren’t we?’”

The summit was at a central point in the IAC conference that has heard Hillary Clinton speak of ending AIDS for good.

In a charismatic address at the start of the conference, Clinton said, “The ability to prevent and treat the disease has advanced beyond what we might have reasonably hoped 22 years ago. Yes, AIDS is still incurable, but it no longer has to be a death sentence.

“Now with the progress we have made together, we can look ahead to a historic goal - creating an AIDS-free generation. We will not back off, we will not back down, we will fight for the resources necessary to achieve this historic milestone.”

Francois Hollande, new president of France, has also called for a global financial transaction tax to fund AIDS projects, which France has unilaterally decided to

implement on Aug. 1.

Michel Sidibe, head of UNAIDS, said in a keynote address, "I want you to close your eyes. Listen to my words. We can end AIDS. But this opportunity will evaporate if we do not act, and history will never forgive us."

Rev. Alan Bain has been an Anglican minister since 1978 and has been vicar of St. Philip and St. James Bath since 1981. He became involved with HIV and AIDS as a result of his church's involvement with Uganda, South Africa, Eastern Europe and India over the last 20 years. He is a founding member and chair of CHAA (The Christian HIV/AIDS Alliance), which brings together 18 of the major U.K. agencies working in the field of HIV and AIDS. He has also been a broadcaster with the BBC. This column first appeared on [The Baptist Times](#).