

Action Resources

Treatment Action Campaign

Local MCC Site Re-enactment

The Treatment Action Campaign is a South African grassroots pressure group which was founded by Zackie Achmat, and HIV-positive activist who refused anti-retroviral treatment (ARVs) until they were universally available. He eventually began to take ARV's after a heart attack in 2004, when it became clear he would quickly die without treatment. At that time, the government was soon to capitulate to demands to implement nationwide treatment. ARV's began to be available at a national level in public hospitals in March 2004, yet the rollout is still incomplete. TAC continues to protest and sue the government (working with the AIDS Law Project) as needed to encourage the rollout.

The Treatment Action Campaign was launched on 10 December 1998, International Human Rights Day. Its main objective is to campaign for greater access to HIV treatment for all South African, by raising public awareness and understanding about issues surrounding the availability, affordability and use of HIV treatments. TAC has been noted for using protest techniques from the anti-apartheid movement for AIDS activism. Achmat was himself an ANC member and an ANC activist during the apartheid struggle.

What might be the shape of a local MCC approach to a re-enactment of a Treatment Action Campaign?

An Ecumenical Prayer Service? A Community Rally? and/or...?

Read this first!

Whatever format you choose for an event at your church, always remember that *no MCC is too small to do this well*. Successful churches (of any size) are always busy and often understaffed. The urgency of our mission guarantees that “our reach will always exceed our grasp.” Church leaders will be very careful about committing to a project such as the TAC, because they know that such a potentially high-profile project will be the face of the local church’s ministry to the community, and because the stakes are very high, and only our very best will do. The good news is that this is a project that will attract willing and able volunteers by the numbers, so it can be a shared experience that will inspire and strengthen everyone it touches, even as it accomplishes its larger objectives.

The keys to success are simple: Here are 10 steps to an effective project.

1. Make copies of the relevant materials in this Ministry Kit and share the materials with your leadership and your core group of volunteers. Ask your leaders and volunteers to look through these, and then do some mind-sharing with them about how to clearly and successfully articulate your rationale for committing your MCC’s leadership and congregation to this project. Formulate a rationale clearly stating the reasons *why* we can and must do it. Your arguments should explain our involvement to people of faith. It should also be stated in terms of *social*

justice arguments of base-level human decency, the social contract, love of families and children. This mobilizes and motivates volunteers across a wider spectrum and helps to neutralize naysayers and critics. Be ready to clearly articulate the *who, what, when, where and why* of your proposed action.

2. Assign oversight of this task to someone with personal passion and interest in the project...someone with good organizational skills and a history of follow-through.
3. Ask your Organizer (by whatever title you use for them) to begin recruiting people with a passion for this project (people such as activists, writers, artists, speakers, etc.). First – identify and recruit volunteers who have a passion for these issues and assign them areas of supervision and/or specific tasks with accountability and deadlines. You can find them through signups OR by a poll or survey which offers people the opportunity to *identify* their personal passions and interests and their individual skills and gifts. Be sure also to offer everybody else a way in which they can participate.
4. Don't restrict your search to MCCers. Asking for volunteers from *every* community group is an excellent strategy. Offer them lots of encouragement and public credit for their involvement, and they will harness the resources and contacts of their organization to help you achieve success.
5. Find a media *hook* to hang it on...promote this project in a way that will *capture* public interest and attract FREE media coverage. You need an *angle* to capture the attention of local media. (NOTE: "hook" and "angle" are not bad words in this context.) Brain-storm this with the creative people around you. Develop a *theme* for a media hook: *we are all in this together because in an important sense, we are all HIV+*.

-- To get FREE publicity and fullest coverage by local media, you need to consider what is attractive to them. Think about photographers and TV cameras and what kind of pictures they like to capture. Here are a few ideas (feel free to use these and/or develop more of your own).

- Gather a diverse group of people who can have their faces shown in media around your church's altar and have them all wearing an "HIV+" t-shirt. Take a good photo of them praying at your MCC altar (perhaps in a communion setting). Send the photo with your media releases to local newspapers and News Directors of your local TV stations.
- People who can't have their faces shown can participate too! Fill a church pew full of diverse people with "HIV+" tattoos on both hands. Take a good photo of this row of "praying hands" (just the tattooed hands folded in prayer) and send it to your local community newspapers and magazines (all of them) and be sure to send copies with your media releases to the New Directors of your local TV stations. Enclose a sample tattoo with each submission.

- Take some good photos of the tattooed and t-shirted group at strategic locations around your town. Tell the news people when and where they can find and photograph/interview your appointed spokespersons. ASK your media sources if it's possible to arrange a few interviews and/or photo opportunities IN ADVANCE of your scheduled events.

6. Arrange a simple ecumenical prayer service and invite your entire congregation and community. Send invitations to all your community groups and clergy associations, and personally call those you know and ASK them for a commitment to attend and/or participate. (*Saturdays at 11am has often been a popular scheduling choice for this kind of gathering.*) Be sure to include this information in all of your media releases.

7. Identify local companies, organizations, and individuals who might be willing to co-sponsor with you. ASK them to make commitments for monies for additional t-shirts, tattoos, and videos as needed for additional publicity and promotional materials.

8. Approach local politicians, legislators and medical professionals. ASK them to help you in some way. Remind them how easy it is for them to be supportive of this, and how important it is for all of us.

9. Be ready to show everybody you contact a *specific objective* and *time frame* for what you are planning. Have a plan for regular ongoing updates on your progress and a follow-up plan for thanking and reporting.

10. Now that you know what you're doing and when and where you're doing it, **don't forget to get the word out!** Remember that everyone you approach for help is a potential town-crier with a sphere of influence. ASK them to help you get the word out. ASK every business and organization your approach to give you space on their Bulletin Board or an announcement in their newsletter or monthly mailing.

***DON'T FORGET TO ASK all the writers, bloggers, people with websites, and assorted other computer mavens (including ChatRoom and bulletin Board devotees) in your congregation to help you get the word out. They love to do this!

NOTE:

The word ASK is used many times in these suggestions. IT unlocks the door to a successful project. (James 4:2) "... You have not///because you do not ASK"

Other Suggested World AIDS Day Actions and Activities

- Talk to other GBLT organizations in your area and collaborate on a public action or educational workshop.
- Go to the Mall, your City capitol, ride the bus, go somewhere where there are lots of people, straight or gay and wear your HIV+ t-shirt. Use the opportunity to engage people in conversation about issues around HIV/AIDS and then have a talk about your experience at church the following Sunday.
- For those interested in re-enacting some of the more radical actions of the late 1980's; perhaps in collaboration with a local SoulForce chapter consider a peaceful non-verbal protest consisting simply of a large group of people, wearing HIV+ T-shirts worshipping together in an anti-gay religious organizations' service might be considered. If nothing else an opportunity to dialog about this kind of action would be valuable to your community. Rent and show the documentary "Stop the Church" as background to a discussion about such an action. You may include questions such as: How did people participating feel during the action? How did other people respond to the action? Are these kinds of actions still relevant today?
- Arrange a screening of State of Denial or another HIV/AIDS themed movie and have a discussion afterwards.
- Arrange a public memorial service for people who have died of AIDS. Make a public invitation to those who have lost people due to AIDS to participate. A simple ceremony consisting of a song such as "Imagine" or "Amazing Grace" have individuals come up and light a candle for their loved one and say "I remember Joe who touched my life" giving each person only about 1 minute to speak. Conclude with a moment of silence and a song such as "Calling All Angels" by Jane Siberry/KD Lang, "Wind Beneath My Wings" by Bette Midler or "Candle in the Wind" by Elton John.
- Locate a residential facility that serves dually or triply diagnosed individuals, men women or children. This usually means the residents are involved in substance use, or have some kind of mental illness in addition to their HIV diagnosis. Identify the facility's material needs, and make sure that their Hanukkah and Christmas observances are resourced and that the residents receive gifts appropriate to their needs. Dually and triply diagnosed people are often at greatest risk and the most difficult to treat.
- Receive an offering to support the Mother of Peace Orphanage which serves children orphaned by HIV/AIDS or who themselves have HIV/AIDS. We have included pledge cards that can be returned to the Fellowship offices. Again, the movie State of Denial starkly depicts the situation of children living with HIV/AIDS in Africa.