

Churches join for ecumenical World AIDS Day service

For the past several years, parishioners of St. Cecilia, Baltimore, have paid homage to men and women living with HIV/AIDS and those who have died as a result of the virus with a special service on World AIDS Day.

But on Dec. 1 - the 19th anniversary of the first World AIDS Day - the parish will expand its annual prayers of hope to include people from other parishes and other faiths.

St. Cecilia parishioners will join nine other Baltimore churches in the John Wesley United Methodist Church for three and a half hours of ecumenical-spiritual fellowship.

In Maryland where 82 percent of the people reported living with HIV/AIDS are black, it is appropriate for the parish to reach out to the churches in the predominately-black West Baltimore region to come together this year, said Lynda M. Brown, a St. Cecilia parishioner and an organizer of this year's ecumenical fellowship.

"We feel that it's a world issue and a local issue," said Ms. Brown, a Grove Park resident and a public health professional. "The numbers are staggering in Baltimore City. If we don't come out of the closet about the facts of the disease, we won't get a handle on it."

The Maryland Department of Health & Mental Hygiene reported that in 2005 a total of 29,818 people in the state were living with HIV and AIDS, and Baltimore-Towson had the second highest incident AIDS case report rate of any major metropolitan area.

Catholic parishes participating in the ecumenical service are St. Cecilia, St. Bernardine, St. Peter Claver, St. Joseph's Passionist Monastery Church - all in West Baltimore - and St. Matthew, Northwood.

The other parishes are New Calvary Life (Pentecostal) Temple, John Wesley United Methodist, St. Mary the Virgin (Episcopal), Sacred Zion Full Gospel Baptist and Wayland Baptist - all in West Baltimore.

The 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m. service will include music, Scripture, oral testimony of people living with HIV/AIDS, and a love offering collection that will be donated to an HIV organization in Baltimore, Ms. Brown said.

“We will be honoring the men and women who are living with HIV/AIDS, while also honoring the memory of those who have transitioned to be with the Lord,” she said. “Our theme is ‘Take the lead, stop AIDS, keep the promise.’”