UPDATE: National Faith HIV/AIDS Awareness Day 2021

You can now watch the short documentary-style film “My Faith. My Story.”—about HIV and religion in the South. Here’s how.

August 30, 2021 By Trent Straube

UPDATE August 30: You can watch the My Faith. My Story video, which debuted August 29, in the Facebook post below:

Sunday, August 29, marks National Faith HIV/AIDS Awareness Day (NFHAAD or FaithAIDSDay) 2021. Scheduled for the last Sunday of August, the event “addresses HIV stigma in all faith communities in the United States” and “encourages faith communities to take a stand against stigma in their congregations and raise awareness of HIV,” according to FaithAIDSDay.com.

The centerpiece of this year’s awareness day is the short documentary-style film My Faith. My Story. It’ll screen on Facebook 4 p.m. EST, Sunday, August 29. A trailer for the film is embedded at the top of this article and in the link below. Sign up for the free screening on the Facebook events page My Faith. My Story.

Following the screening is a live Q&A with folks who participated in the film, including faith leaders, advocates and people living with HIV in the South.

The film and screening are the products of a partnership between the National Faith HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, the Southern AIDS Coalition, Wake Forest University Gilead COMPASS Initiative, RAHMA (Reaching All HIV+ Muslims in America) and the United States Conference on HIV Faith Coalition. The organizers also created an awareness day toolkit you can download here as a PDF.

This isn’t the first time many of these groups have collaborated. As POZ reported in February, Wake Forest University School of Divinity in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, inaugurated a faith coordinating center to fight HIV. This was made possible through a $5 million grant from Gilead Sciences’ COMPASS Initiative (the name stands for “COMmitment to Partnership in Addressing HIV/AIDS in Southern States”).

National Faith HIV/AIDS Awareness Day was launched by HIV-negative ally Khadijah Abdullah and her nonprofit organization, RAHMA. You can read more about her in the POZ profile "Fighting With Mercy." Abdullah also penned a HuffPost blog about RAHMA titled "Are You Woke Yet?"

> To mark National Faith HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, join AIDS United's Marvell L. Terry II and Rev. Stephen A. Green, chair of Faith for Black Lives and pastor of Metropolitan Harlem, for a conversation about how we can #StopHIVTogether on our Facebook page: https://t.co/mvDQvIUms3 pic.twitter.com/Pgv85caFxa
>
> — AIDS United (@AIDS_United) August 23, 2021

AIDS services organizations and community leaders across the country have planned numerous events around the awareness day, such as the event promoted by AIDS United in the tweet above. To find out what's going on near you, or what you can participate in online, check with your local groups and search social media for the hashtags #FaithAIDSDay and #NFHAAD.

Why did the awareness day organizers focus this year's awareness day on the South? "According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the Southern region of the United States makes up roughly 40% of the U.S. population but accounts for 45% of all people living with HIV in the country and 51% of new diagnoses—more than any other region," explains the trailer for My Faith. My Story.

What's more, the video continues, "Pew research reports that Black Americans are the most religious racial ethnic group in the United States. This includes Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex or asexual persons and persons living with HIV in the South who rely on their personal faith to navigate issues around health and wellness but who sometimes lack the support to safely explore the intersection between HIV and faith in their community.

"We invite you into a safe space for storytelling where advocates, faith leaders and people living with HIV address the challenges inherent in responding to the HIV epidemic in the Southern United States as people and communities of faith."

In related news, Friday, August 20, marked the annual Southern HIV/AIDS Awareness Day (SHAAD). The event was launched two years ago by the Southern AIDS Coalition because, as stated on SouthernSolution.org, "There is an HIV/AIDS crisis in the South. This reality requires all of

us to be engaged in collective, bold and innovative strategies to reduce these disparities."

To coincide with the awareness day, researchers published the report "HIV in the U.S. Deep South: Trends From 2008–2019." Data in the report showed that the Deep South has the highest rate of new HIV cases and also experiences the highest rate of HIV-related deaths.

The Deep South consists of the following nine states, which share similar cultures: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas. The remaining Southern States are Arkansas, Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, Oklahoma, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia.

For more details about the report, including nine key takeaways, check out "Which U.S. Regions Sees the Highest Rate of HIV Diagnoses Death?"

Click the hashtag #Faith for a collection of POZ articles about the topic. You'll find headlines such as "Watch People of Faith Renew Their Fight Against HIV—and COVID-19," "From Alabama to Africa, Faith Fuels Aquarius Gilmer's Advocacy" and "Walking in Purpose: Joyce Turner Kelly Fights HIV Stigma in the Church."

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