Magic Johnson: Black Churches Must Join Fight Against AIDS

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At the 2009 National HIV Prevention Conference in Atlanta, basketball Hall of Famer Earvin "Magic" Johnson, who has been HIV positive for nearly 20 years, said that black religious leaders need to get more involved in HIV/AIDS prevention and care, the *Southern Voice* reports. To that end, the Magic Johnson Foundation, which Johnson founded after announcing he was HIV positive in 1991, is working to partner with black churches to fight the epidemic, which disproportionately affects African Americans.

"A lot has changed since I announced [my status]," Johnson said. "We now have a major problem in urban America, in inner cities—the face of AIDS has changed from a gay white man's disease to a black and Latino disease. And if we don't get the black church involved, there is no way we can bring these numbers [of new HIV cases] down."

According to 2006 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, African Americans make up just 12 percent of the U.S. population but account for 45 percent of new HIV infections and 46 percent of overall cases.

"We all have to get black churches involved. If we do, we will see change quickly," Johnson said. "One constant in the black community is the church."

He suggested that churches can use their vans to transport people living with HIV to doctors' appointments and pharmacies to pick up their medications. In addition, he said, pastors should be encouraged to promote HIV testing among their congregations.

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