



## MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Feb. 22, 2017

### **FAITH Coalition commemorates National Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS**

*Knoxville, Tenn.* – The FAITH Coalition will mark the 2017 National Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS, March 5 - 11, with education, prayer and HIV testing. The coalition joins thousands of communities across the country observing the week in an effort to bring attention and awareness to the AIDS epidemic, as well as to encourage a national dialogue on prevention, treatment and care.

The coalition will commemorate the week with a prayer breakfast on **Saturday, March 11 at 8:30 a.m. at the Community Evangelistic Church, 2650 Boyds Bridge Pike**. The keynote speaker is Dr. Perness C. Seele, the founder of the National Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS, now in its 26th year. Dr. Seele is also the founder and CEO of The Balm in Gilead, Inc., a not-for-profit organization created to prevent disease and improve the health status of individuals who are disproportionately affected by health disparities, especially with regards to HIV, hepatitis C, cervical cancer and sexual violence. A licensed minister, Dr. Seele's presentation is titled "The Church and HIV: Is There a Balm in Gilead?" The prayer breakfast is free and open to faith leaders, but RSVP is requested by Feb. 27 by calling 865-215-5170.

"Dr. Seele is known for her extraordinary vision and ability to create national and global partnerships among leaders of various cultures and faith communities," said Rev. Dr. John A. Butler, chair of the FAITH Coalition and presiding elder of the Knoxville District AME Zion Church.

According to the Tennessee Department of Health, 16,903 Tennesseans were living with HIV in 2015. The black community has been particularly hard hit by the epidemic in Tennessee, accounting for more than half (56.4 percent) of those infected. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates more than 1.2 million Americans are living with HIV and that 1 in 8 do not know they are infected.

"Together our faith leaders and church communities can have a tremendous impact, eliminating the stigma, educating the community and hopefully eradicating this horrible epidemic," added Butler.

The National Week of Prayer also includes an Ecumenical Prayer Vigil and Continuous Prayer Chain on **Sunday, March 5 at 6 p.m. at the Wesley Foundation, 1718 Melrose Place**. Various campus ministries will host the ecumenical prayer vigil. The event is free and open to the public. Faith leaders will pray for courage and inspiration to respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic with compassion. Samaritan Ministry will offer free HIV testing at the event. Immediately following the vigil, area groups will begin a prayer chain that lasts throughout the week. Visit [Facebook.com/Knox County - National Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS](https://www.facebook.com/KnoxCounty-NationalWeekofPrayerfortheHealingofAIDS) to participate in the prayer chain.



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The CDC recommends everyone aged 13 to 64 get tested for HIV at least once. Although there is no cure, getting medical care and taking medicines regularly helps those infected live longer, healthier lives and also lowers the chances of passing HIV on to others. Confidential HIV testing is available at all three Knox County Health Department locations:

Main Clinic and Offices  
140 Dameron Ave.  
Knoxville, TN 37917  
865-215-5370

Teague Clinic  
405 Dante Rd.  
Knoxville, TN 37918  
865-215-5500

West Clinic  
1028 Old Cedar Bluff Rd.  
Knoxville, TN 37923  
865-215-5950

### **About the FAITH Coalition**

The FAITH Coalition (Faith-based Approaches and Initiatives To help reduce HIV/AIDS) is a local alliance of people of faith concerned about HIV/AIDS. The coalition's mission is to create and foster positive community relationships that promote and enhance HIV/AIDS awareness and education through faith-based and other initiatives. The Knox County Health Department provides staff support and facilitation to the FAITH Coalition as part of its HIV prevention and awareness outreach efforts.

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*Available for interviews:*

*Dr. Pernessa Seele, CEO, The Balm in Gilead: 804-644-2256*

*Rev. Dr. John A. Butler, FAITH Coalition chair: 865-617-2603*

*Wayne Smith, FAITH Coalition vice chair: 865-705-1161*

*Rev. Tim Kobler, UT Wesley Foundation Director and FAITH Coalition member: 865-522-2728*