



# A Message to The Faith Leaders of Nyanza

Help reduce HIV by encouraging Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision (VMMC) today



## **Why you should encourage Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision (VMMC) amongst your congregation:**

Your congregation looks to you, not just for spiritual guidance, but also for practical advice on how to lead their lives. The Luo community has far higher rates of HIV than anywhere else in Kenya. Your community needs your help to prevent further infections.

Now with VMMC, there is another tool at your disposal. You can help reduce HIV by encouraging male circumcision amongst your congregation today.

### **Q: What is Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision (VMMC)?**

A: VMMC is the removal of the foreskin from the head of the penis. It is a widely used, simple and safe procedure. Men can be circumcised at any age. While many men in Kenya have already undergone the procedure, only 10% of Luo men in Nyanza are circumcised today.

### **Q: How does VMMC help combat HIV?**

A: The inside of the foreskin is soft and moist and is more likely to get a tiny tear or sore that allows HIV to enter the body more easily. The foreskin itself contains many 'target cells' that allow HIV to enter the body easily. After circumcision, the skin on the head of the penis becomes thicker and is less likely to tear. A circumcised man is up to 60% less likely to get HIV than an uncircumcised man.

### **Q: Are there any other benefits of VMMC?**

A: Yes, VMMC also reduces a man's chances of getting other infections like syphilis and herpes and, for women, can protect against cervical cancer.

### **Q: Is VMMC alone enough to combat HIV?**

A: No, it only reduces a man's chances of contracting HIV, it does not protect him completely. Within marriage, both partners must know their HIV status, and both must remain faithful to each other or use protection. Others may need to be encouraged to reduce the number of their sexual partners and to use protection.

### **Q: Is it difficult for a grown man to be circumcised?**

A: No. The procedure is simple and takes a short time. Male circumcision provided by a trained health provider in a registered clinic or hospital is a very safe procedure and complications are rare. An injection is given at the base of the penis to make it go numb, so that no pain is felt while the foreskin is cut off. The wound is then stitched, cleaned and bandaged. After 3 days the bandage is removed, and there is a check up after 7 days.

### **Q: What practical steps can I take to help promote VMMC within my congregation?**

A: There are many steps you can take:

- Dedicate prayers and sermons specifically to VMMC and HIV/AIDS prevention.
- Use religious ceremonies like weddings, funerals, confirmations, initiations, holidays and festivals to raise and discuss the issue.
- Hold VMMC seminars with groups like the Church Elders and the Mothers Union.
- Give out information and leaflets to your congregation. This material can be obtained from your local health center.

## **Q: How should I talk with the women of my congregation?**

A: Wives and mothers play an important role in convincing their husbands to go for VMMC. Explain to them the health benefits for both their husbands and themselves; encourage them to join their partners for HIV testing and counseling; ask them to encourage their husbands, sons and other male relatives to get circumcised.

## **Q: What should I tell men in my congregation about VMMC?**

A: Tell men that VMMC is about responsibility, self-respect and cleanliness. Make sure to tell them to abstain from sex for at least 6 weeks after the VMMC procedure, to remain faithful or reduce the number of their sexual partners. More information on VMMC, and the procedure itself, is available at all major health clinics and hospitals in Nyanza province.

## **How to write a sermon addressing the issue of VMMC and HIV/AIDS prevention**

A good sermon on VMMC should not link HIV infection to sin or evil because that only stigmatizes people. The sermon could be structured as follows:

1. The importance of making wise choices.
2. How VMMC works - it is like armour.
3. Looking after yourself and fighting HIV/AIDS is a Christian responsibility.
4. After VMMC, celibacy remains important to avoid infections; fidelity is key within marriage and so is the reduction of sexual partners.

Quotes from the scripture that can illustrate sermons addressing VMMC

### **On the importance of making wise choices in life:**

- “Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.” Proverbs 4: 26-27
- “For the ear trieth words, as the mouth tasteth meat. Let us choose to use judgment: let us know among ourselves what is good.” Job 34: 3-4

Life is all about choices. The Bible urges us to make the wise and the good choice – VMMC is wise, and so is abstaining from sex, especially after the VMMC procedure, and being faithful in general.

### **On how VMMC works – it’s like armour:**

- “And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put a helmet of brass upon his head, also he armed him with a coat of mail.” 1 Samuel 17: 38
- “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” Ephesians 6: 13

Wearing armour like VMMC helps protect you from HIV but it does not mean that you cannot be killed - ensure that you protect yourself from HIV.

### **On how preventing HIV is a Christian responsibility:**

- “For every man shall bear his own burden.” Galatians 6:5
- “God [is] my strength [and] power: and he maketh my way perfect. He maketh my feet like hinds’ [feet]: and setteth me upon my high places. He teacheth my hands to war; so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms.” 2 Samuel 22: 33-35

The battle against HIV involves the entire community with the church as its center. It is your responsibility to take part – for yourself, your family and the whole congregation.

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## Help reduce HIV by encouraging Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision (VMMC) today:

- Include VMMC in your teachings and activities in a creative way.
- Link VMMC with responsibility, self-respect and cleanliness.
- Encourage your congregation to be non-judgmental of people living with HIV/AIDS.

## Remember to avoid:

- Linking HIV infection or AIDS with sin, as this will only increase stigma.
- Recommending VMMC to men too forcefully, as it does not suit everyone.
- Suggesting VMMC as a short cut for HIV prevention. It is only one part of the battle against HIV.