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**PASTORS' WIVES ENCOURAGE HEALTH, WELLNESS
IN COMMUNITIES OF COLOR ACROSS GREATER LOS ANGELES
Walgreens First Ladies Health Initiative kicks off on Friday, April 8**

(Los Angeles) – The statistics are beyond alarming. Cases of sexually-transmitted diseases have reached all-time highs in the United States. African Americans account for an estimated 44% of all new HIV infections among adults and adolescents. African-American and Latino communities also suffer from a higher prevalence of preventable, systemic illnesses – such as hepatitis, diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and certain forms of cancer.

Realizing that action must be taken, in 2008, Walgreens began sponsoring the First Ladies Health Initiative, a consortium of more than 100 pastors' wives (First Ladies) from across the United States to confront these troubling health disparities. During its First Ladies Health Days, houses of worship representing all denominations in four major metropolitan areas will open their doors to the community to provide free medical testing for a variety of illnesses and conditions. To date, nearly 200,000 medical and health tests have been performed and many lives have been saved.

The 2016 season kicks off in Los Angeles on Saturday, April 9, with a press conference; and, on Sunday, April 10, First Ladies Health Day, hosted by 35 first ladies who represent congregations of more than 10,000 people. Together, they are utilizing their collective influence to stage a citywide health takeover, directing their communities to get tested, know their health status and actively participate in wellness programs.

"In our communities, the church serves a multitude of purposes, including 'hospital' for the spiritually downtrodden; so, it is a natural fit to open the doors of the church to offer these health services, empowering attendees of all ages to declare war on these systemic, chronic and often deadly medical issues," said First Lady Rinnita Thompson of Southern Missionary Baptist Church; and First Ladies Health Day/LA co-chair.

This year, several first ladies in Los Angeles and Orange County are featured in the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) national HIV campaign, *Doing It*. In print and digital materials, the first ladies are quoted stressing the importance of breaking the barriers and stigma about HIV testing, along with their role in helping their congregations and communities take the first steps toward healthier lifestyles.

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First Ladies Health Day/2

The First Ladies Health Initiative's HIV awareness outreach also extends across the globe via a partnership with bioLytical Laboratories and the Bishop Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation. For every HIV test taken at a First Ladies Health Day location, bioLytical Laboratories will donate a free testing kit to facilities in South Africa.

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“Not only does this partnership enable us to meet the needs of people who desire a sixty second HIV test result; but, we also strive to have our test reach other patients in a country that has significantly higher rates of HIV,” said Stan Miele, Chief Commercial Officer, bioLytical Laboratories.

“Our stores are proudly located at the corner of happy and healthy, and what better place to connect with our customers than through the First Ladies Health Day which promotes happy families and healthy options,” said John Gremer, director of Community Relations, Walgreens.

Tracey Alston, executive director of the First Ladies Health Initiative, expressed the main goal of the program: “The First Ladies Health Initiative is a one-of-its-kind effort that positions the church as the nucleus for large-scale health and wellness outreach. Ultimately, we want to empower minority and low-income communities with the essential healthcare resources so they can take control of their health. It is crucial that these communities have access to health information and medical experts, as well as free health tests which can sometimes cost hundreds of dollars.”

Additional participating health partners and volunteers for First Ladies Health Day include: Walgreens pharmacists, AltaMed, the Alzheimer’s Association, the American Diabetes Association, CareMore, Cedars-Sinai, City of Hope, and Susan G. Komen®. For more information on the First Ladies Health Day in Los Angeles or a full list of participating churches and their First Ladies, please visit: www.FirstLadiesHealth.com; or call 213-394-0844.

About the Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation

The Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation is a center of excellence for HIV and TB research. The foundation is a not-for-profit organization that has operated in association with the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town since 2004. It works in partnership with government health agencies and local and international partners to upscale and improve the management and treatment of tuberculosis and related infections.

About the First Ladies Health Initiative

The First Ladies Health Initiative is held annually in metropolitan areas across the U.S., including Chicago, Gary, Ind., Los Angeles, and Orange County, Calif. It is designed to bring awareness to illnesses that disproportionately affect African Americans, Latinos and low-income communities. The program kicks off with a luncheon attended by nearly 200 pastors’ wives who receive information from medical professionals on how to educate their communities about various illnesses. The program culminates with First Ladies Health Day, the largest health day of its kind in the nation. Chicago’s Danielle Ashley Group manages the program on behalf of Walgreens. More information is available at www.firstladieshealth.com.

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