



The Rev. Harold Lawary reflects on his childhood in front of his old house on Donovan Avenue in East St. Louis.

'WE ARE ALL GIVEN A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF TIME. I'M JUST GOING TO RIDE IT UNTIL THE WHEELS FALL OFF.'



Lawary gets help from ministers Patricia Tate, left, and Wilta Holt after he lost his composure during a Sunday morning service at New Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church in Centreville.



Lawary cries during a memorial service for his mother. He is holding a newspaper with the story of her death.



Lawary receives an examination from Dr. Darren Wethers.



Lawary plays with his nephew, Malik Lawary, 12.



Lawary participates in a funding meeting at the East St. Louis Library board. Lawary serves on a number of different boards and committees.



Lawary holds his godniece, Des'ree Sanders, as he prepares breakfast. Niece Victoria Ivy, 17, joins him. Lawary lives with his sister and her children.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ZIA NIZAMI

PRAYER | After living a life of reckless behavior, AIDS survivor has a spiritual awakening

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'I was reckless....'

boyfriends would get drunk and beat her in front of him and his brothers and sisters.

In June 1984, her last boyfriend shot her to death in the parking lot of a Alorton supermarket. She was 49. The man went home and, with the same handgun, killed himself with a single shot to the head.

Four months later, Lawary learned he was HIV-positive.

He was 23 then, and scared. "Yeah, I went out and got drunk," Lawary said, recalling that he had polished off almost a fifth of E&J brandy that night.

Lawary found out he had the AIDS virus from a letter he had received after giving blood at a community blood drive.

"It said something was wrong with my blood," Lawary recalled. "Because the letter

didn't say HIV, I didn't put it there."

Lawary said he believes he was infected with the virus less than a year before, through unprotected sex with an older partner, who has subsequently died.

Lawary declined to describe how, specifically, he was infected. But it occurred during a time in his life when he was living as a "party animal," he said. "I was reckless in my sexual be-

havior. I was experimenting, and I was exploring."

Lawary emphasizes he is a much different man than he was 20 years ago.

"I'm a better person today," he said. "It really hurts me when I look back at my past behavior. It was so stupid."

AIDS as a thorn

After learning he had HIV, Lawary moved to Houston, where he worked in the finan-

cial aid office of a business college. He only shared with a few friends the information about his HIV.

He returned to East St. Louis in 1994 and became involved in community affairs. Until late August, he had served on the East St. Louis Library board of trustees. A television background also led him to produce programs for a cable access channel in East St. Louis, which helped push him toward a spiri-

tual awakening.

"I met Christ through the eyes of a video camera," he said.

In September 2003, he became ordained as a minister at New Macedonia Church in Centreville.

Today, he is engaged to be married to a woman with two young children. Their relationship has been tenuous at times because of a hesitancy on his

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