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THE CRISIS OF SINGLE MOTHERHOOD:
A PASTORAL COUNSELLING APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

This research dealt with the crisis of single motherhood: A Pastoral counselling approach. The researcher was encouraged to work on this topic because of his experience of single parent's family in the course of his pastorate. The purpose is to help the people who are still passing through single motherhood crisis in their life to trust in God; for this situation is not the end of their lives.

The instrument used by the researcher is a self-designed questionnaire. The single mothers in some selected churches in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State were used as sample. In this study according to the research it is affirmed that there are reasonable number of single mothers in the church passing through the trauma of singlehood. The factors that cause this single motherhood were looked into in the study which includes: divorce, teenage pregnancy and death of a spouse. The effects of single motherhood were also discovered in the research like emotional, spiritual, physical, moral and psychological which reduced the victims to the bearest minimum. Those who have passed through this problem and those who are passing through it and how they cope with life were discussed too. Therefore, on the basis of findings, recommendations were raised of how the people should be helped by pastors and churches because single mothers crisis is a serious problem in our community of faith.

In the light of this, full attention should be given in finding solution to the growing monster called single motherhood in our churches as it does not lead to the proper development of the church.

Conclusion

It is an established fact that we have single mothers among us and the number is increasing because of death, divorce and teenage pregnancy. This was revealed by the result of the study. Whatever way it takes every generation, regardless of age, status and tribe is normally visited by this trauma.

Whenever death, divorce, or teenage pregnancy occurs, women are usually at the receiving end. It marks the beginning of suffering and change of identity. They are reduced and humbled to the barest minimum. Some single mothers are passing through "hell on earth" because they were not adequately catered for by their relatives and friends. Above all, the church herself has failed in this regard. The church often times compound single mother's problems by not providing helping hands, by not ministering to their spiritual and physical needs and by not regarding them as part of the community of faith.

From the research in chapter four, it was revealed that children with single parents are likely to become emotionally disturbed because anyone who has lost one of his parents as a child is likely to experience some form of emotional breakdown in later life than one who has kept them both. They also suffer deprivation and denial of some rights and opportunities. The children physical, mental, social and moral developments are also affected. It is therefore the duty of the surviving parent, the church and the society at large to show love to such children.

The researcher also discovered that single mothers uses personal prayer, seeking of counsel, church fellowship, reading Bible/Christian literature to cope with the problem of single mothers. In view of the discoveries made by the researcher, the trauma of being a solo parent, and the grief that follows thereafter can affect the total being of the mother. Likewise, the different predicaments faced by the affected persons in this state required that they be ministered to pastorally and not be left alone to themselves.

The parents who are passing through the state of single motherhood should trust God and have faith in Him and his word which says, "come unto me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). God is able to wipe away your tears and to replace your sorrow with joy, only have unshakable faith in Him and it shall be well.

Recommendations

Through the detailed information collected during the course of this project and practical knowledge acquired when writing this essay, it was discovered that many family today are headed by single mothers. The mothers in this condition need to be helped because of the frustration they are passing through from the relations, in-laws, friends and neighbours. The recommendations below can be source of help that will bring relief to their hearts or brings solution to their problems, not only help the single mothers but even the church, and the community to rise up to their responsibilities in ministering to solo parents.

1. The teaching of basic biblical principles of marriage should be encouraged. It needs to be taught clearly at home and church. The church should be practical in its teachings with more emphasis on the development of Christian faith and character. The teaching can be on God's plan for marriage and consequences of broken homes. They should be made to understand that sex is good, important and necessary but it is allowed only in marriage. Dangers of premarital sex should be uncovered.
2. The single parents should also be counseled on social needs of their children so that their academic work will not suffer at school. Children and their parents should be counseled along their religious affiliation, as it affects their children's academic achievement.
3. The church should organize a counselling and prayer centre for single parents. Those who have burden for one parent family and called to serve should be placed in these areas. Mere volunteers should

not be part of this scheme. Such workers should be duly chosen by the church and personally convinced that they are called to do the work. Such centres should serve as target centres for single mothers. Every single mother needs counselling and prayer no matter how spiritually high she is. Healing for single mothers is a gradual process that needs series of counselling and prayer by the church.

4. Seminars and teachings could be organized for solo parents by the church to avail them the opportunity to freely discuss their problems and share their feelings. The need for the spiritual wellbeing of the single mothers is very important. They need to know what the Bible says concerning their problems. They should be properly taught. They are a special and delicate part of the congregation.

5. The churches must give economic empowerment to single mothers as they may not be able to cope with their financial upkeep. It should help them to acquire skills which will give them business opportunities like in agriculture (poultry, piggery and farming) or investment in shares.

6. The pastor should organize visitation team for single mothers. Since loneliness is one of the greatest weapons used by Satan to attack single parents, the pastor can delegate the women's fellowship to assign some women to visit single mothers. This can be done immediately after the shock stage. Subsequent visits can follow. If the church does not visit the widow, the world will visit her and influence her negatively.

7. The pastor should encourage the church as well as relations to relate to the group of women who have become rather sensitive to everything that happens to them.

8. People should have change of mind towards single parents no matter the cause of singlehood. People should know that single parents are already down thus they need someone to motivate them to rise up. They should not be ignored, stigmatized and mistreated in their predicament.

9. The church should put in place ministry to the single mothers with those who have suffered the trauma of divorce, desertion or death of a spouse. Programme of activities such as single parents seminars, single parent Sunday, solo parents workshops, Bible classes for single parents are some of the activities to be planned for single mothers.

10. The church pastor in his teachings should also emphasis the fact that single mothers have a part to play in their own healing. They should be taught that the situation they found themselves is not the end of their life. They must go on. Therefore when such a separation occurs, they should be prepared to make necessary adjustments in all areas of their lives because their new status calls for that. This could affect their feeding, health facilities, education, house maintenance and clothing, so that they are not totally deprived of every minimal comfort.

11. All young single mothers should be advised to remarry as this will help curtail the number of women in this problem.

12. Finally, all hands should be on deck in ensuring that appropriate counselling programmes such as group counselling, family counselling, home visits and supportive associations are designed by the church to help children from single parents and their parents so as to help them have a sense of belonging. They should buy gifts for them on special days like Easter, Christmas and New Year.