

THE ROLE OF PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSELING TO FAMILIES OF
CHILDREN WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES IN BETHEL BAPTIST
ASSOCIATION OF OGBOMOSO BAPTIST CONFERENCE

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ABSTRACT

Many people in the church face difficulties and want clear solutions. These quests for solutions to life's challenges make some individuals to wander helplessly both day and night. Some even go to the extent of going to 'spiritual houses' and 'Prayer Mountains'. However, the challenges that come with the case of a physically challenged child in a family are a 'different kettle of fish'. Given that such families belong to churches what can their pastor do to ameliorate their predicament? This necessitated this research into the role of pastoral care and counseling to families of children with physical disabilities. The study employed descriptive survey design. Eleven of the churches in Bethel Baptist Association of Ogbomoso Baptist Conference were selected at random and ten questionnaires were administered to each of the churches. Five research questions were posed for verification. A questionnaire was designed and used to collate data. 93 out of the 110 questionnaires administered were returned and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for descriptive statistics of frequencies and simple percentages. Inferences were drawn from the data analyzed. Findings revealed that majority of the church members have significant knowledge on the concept of pastoral care with 87.1% supporting the view that "pastoral care is when the various ministry of the church touch the lives of her members". Results of findings on the level of understanding of some church members on the concept of Physical disability depicts church members' understanding that physical disability includes being crippled, visually impaired, paralyzed, deaf and dumb, deficiency in muscular coordination and speech impairment. Responses also showed that the family of the physically disabled child is affected adversely and that the church can ameliorate this effect by reaching out to them specifically. This places the onus on the church to make concerted efforts through her various ministries by providing financial assistance where possible, creating homogenous group fellowship where families with similar challenges can meet to share and care, etc so as to positively reach the families of the physically disabled child.

5.2 Conclusion

Families of children with physical disabilities are faced with a lot of challenges and if they don't get help from the church it points to the fact that they do not enjoy the full ministry of the pastor and may end up withdrawing their membership from the church. The church being a spiritual family of God must of necessity reach out to such families and make them have a sense of belonging by helping them cope with the various strain that accompany having a child with physical disabilities. By offering support to families with children with disabilities, the church holds great promise to be an agent in the healing process of these children

and their families. When this is done the church ministry will find expression in the lives of such families, expand God's kingdom and fulfill her mission here on earth.

5.3 Recommendations

Pastors are faced with legions of challenges from their parishioners and also from the members of the community wherein he is resident. One of such challenges could be that of ministering to 'special needs' families who after participating actively in praise worship during a worship service go back home to meet 'the child' they had left at home. They are reminded of the burden they have been made to put up with; they are reminded of the many questions to God which have met a seemingly deaf ears; their joy of salvation goes blue because they have come back to the reality of having and living with a physically disabled child.

The ministry of the church can also reach such families by doing the following:

1. Pastors, church leaders, organizations such as the Girls auxiliary, Lydia auxiliary, Royal Ambassadors, and other church departments and the general members of the church should visit such families regularly and assist them domestically where the need arises. Family members may be stressed out and will need a helping hand from the household of faith to help out with chores.
2. To prevent such families from being left out the church should create special Sunday school classes; such a class can be at the convenience of the disabled child where he or she cannot make it to church.
3. Another way the church can minister to such families is to assist in transporting such families to church services.

4. The church should also remove every architectural inhibitor from church premises; and pavements should be created alongside stair ways to facilitate for easy entrance and exit of wheel chairs and other walking aids.
5. Revival programmes are ministry opportunities to affect the lives of the church members. Having an annual family revival will help hurting families to find help in their time of gloom. Families experiencing an absence of marital bliss due to the presence of a physically disabled child will by such family revival find help to renew their marital bliss.
6. Having a general revival talk may not be enough; the church can reach out for a one on one discussion with affected family members by ensuring counseling and possible discipleship of affected family members.
7. Referral opportunities should be explored by networking affected families with relevant NGOs for professional assistance.
8. Problem shared is problem half solved. Affected families should be encouraged to share by the creation of homogenous group fellowship where families with similar challenges can meet to share and care.