

CHURCH ROLE IN FAMILY VALUES

INTRODUCTION

As a denomination we realise that the Bible has stressed the importance of the family and has gone to great lengths to describing the role and function as well as the responsibilities of each relationship in the family. It is also no secret that in this day and age many of these values have been ignored, discarded or compromised by socio economic and political influences.

At present whilst we are faced with an increase in unemployment, it can be said that the major issues destroying the social fabric of the family are poverty and H.I.V. / AIDS. If communities were able to address these two major issues together with the politicians and the business sector, then they would be on a road to recovery, which will realise all the points, mentioned in the Bill of Rights and the freedom Charter.

From a religious perspective it can be safely said that it is God's plan to provide for all His children, and that the Church as presented in the early chapters of the book of Acts was that express vehicle to assist and support all those who were in need.

This document therefore assumes that we as the Church realise that we have a role to play in protecting the family and also intervening where family structures are being destroyed or do not exist.

For the purpose of this document we will utilise the structures and divisions as presented in the White Paper for Social Welfare.

FAMILY SITUATION INDICATORS

Social and economic impact on the family

Migration, violence, changes in the traditional roles of men and women, as well as the inequitable distribution of resources both present and past in addition to divorce and desertion, and the lack of housing have redefined the household structures in our country. We now have predominantly single parent, female headed households in a state of poverty that renders them powerless. Linked to this is also the rise of child headed households as a result of the H.I.V. / AIDS pandemic.

Families are faced with communication, relationship and parenting problems, marital conflict, and a lack of preparation for marriage, remarriage, family violence and a lack of community support networks, which is made worse by the introduction of alcohol and drug abuse. It is recognised that a spiritual foundation is critical for the ongoing existence of the family.

Conditions in communities

The majority of South African communities are overcrowded, unhealthy, and unsafe with a lack of housing and basic amenities such as sanitation, and recreational facilities. Furthermore a lack of knowledge about life skills results in insecure and unstable family life. The conditions now prevailing in the communities coupled to poverty and the lack of family support networks have resulted in the growing numbers of individuals and families who are now living on the streets in urbanised areas.

Children in difficult circumstances

This term relates to those children who have been denied or deprived of their most basic human rights and whose growth and development are consequently impaired.

Preschool children

Whilst this relates to all children up to the age of six there is a concern about the 0 to 36 months group as well as disabled children. At present it is estimated that only one in ten children have access to a preschool and that children from disadvantaged families and rural areas are in most need of early childhood development services. There is no acceptable minimum standards for the provision of services to preschool children resulting in programmes being inadequately resourced and the quality of care being severely compromised.

Out-of-home care

This relates to foster care and children who are currently in children's homes. At present adoption services are being under-utilised, thus preventing children from having a sense of security and permanency in a family context. As a result of the AIDS pandemic an increased number of babies are being abandoned and more children are being affected. Unfortunately the current system is not adequate enough to address the increasing needs of these children.

Disability

Children with mental, physical and sensory disabilities are discriminated against, and denied opportunities such as access to education, recreation and public transport. Some of these disabilities are a direct result of poverty and preventable diseases such as measles, alcohol and drug abuse, or injuries sustained as a result of political and domestic violence. Black children in rural areas and informal settlements are the most vulnerable to disablement of this nature.

Facilities for the early detection and diagnosis, treatment and support, are inadequate – especially in rural areas. Inadequate facilities lead to an increase in the extent and the severity of the disablement. There are inadequate support facilities to keep more severely disabled children in the home environment for as long as possible. There is also a shortage of day care facilities for such children.

Children with chronic diseases

Chronic diseases in childhood limit growth, emotional, social and intellectual development of the child. These impacts on the education of the child as such illnesses cause an interruption to their education and impair their social interaction. It is not uncommon for negative attitudes from adults and adolescents to impede peer group social relationships at a time when the development of such relationships is most critical.

Children with chronic diseases and H.I.V. / AIDS have the same rights as their peers.

Child abuse and neglect

It is not unusual to read our newspapers and watch our television sets and on a daily basis take note of at least three incidents of child abuse. The real extent of child abuse and neglect is unknown as a result of

under – reporting, erratic research, and uncoordinated record keeping. Sexually exploited children are the most vulnerable.

Existing services are fragmented and under resourced whilst in the rural areas there is no service at all. The standards of services vary as a result of the shortage of suitably qualified and trained staff, as well as the limited funding to organisations working in this sector.

Street children

These are divided into two categories – those “on the street”, who are forced by poverty to go to urban areas to earn money, but who have regular contact with their families; and those “of the street” who have permanently deserted their families and communities because of adverse circumstances such as physical, sexual and emotional abuse, or abandonment. These children spend most of their lives unsupervised and unprotected. They live communally and depend on each other for survival.

With the collapse of the family and community structures through adult AIDS deaths it is expected that the number of children on the streets will grow and also become susceptible to negative criminal social influences.

Child labour

Existing legislation prohibits the employment of children under the age of 15. However from a practical perspective there is proof of children being employed from the age of 5 years. In rural areas the girl child expected to be involved in household domestic responsibilities to the detriment of her own education and social development.

Substance abuse

This is increasing amongst school children and at present South Africa is considered as a major target for drug smugglers. Substance abuse is more prevalent at places of entertainment. Children are severely affected by parents who abuse drugs and alcohol; as such behaviour leads to social dysfunction, unemployment, the loss of housing and the loss of self-esteem. In most instances children of such parents start to abuse substances themselves.

Children of divorcing parents

Children of divorced or divorcing parents are a vulnerable group who need special attention. The conflict between parents can negatively affect the interests of the child and in such instances there is a need to help such a child deal with the situation.

Nutrition

Estimates of South Africans who are nutritionally vulnerable are not known but it is evident that the majority is Black and consists largely of children and pregnant women.

STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH THE SITUATION

GENERAL

1. Regional overseers to accept that the church is not limited to specific days and times.
2. Regional overseers to stress to all pastors that the priority in the church should be based on the order of the programme as set out in Acts 2:44-47.
3. Churches to become relevant to the community. This means that the church needs to know the needs of the community and provide the community with practical solutions to the needs.
4. Churches to be places where all people may come and be ministered to on a daily basis.
5. Pastors and leadership in local assemblies to display an attitude of love to all people who come to church in spite of who and what the people might be. This love needs to be demonstrated in a tangible and definite way that does not condemn people but exposes them to the loving grace and mercy of Jesus Christ.
6. Pastors and assembly members must guard against a judgemental spirit. At no time does this mean that we condone sin but rather say “let him who is without sin cast the first stone.”
7. Churches to be considered as places where the spiritually, social, and emotionally wounded person can come and find healing and restoration as was the case of the Samaritan Woman, Zachias, and Mary Magdalene.
8. Churches need to make Jesus Christ more accessible to children and place their spiritual development as a top priority in line with the warnings that Christ made regarding our causing them to stumble.
9. Sunday school, youth and women’s programmes to be increased and time to be extended.
10. Churches to take seriously the need to provide for the spiritual **and material** needs of the household of faith.
11. Churches to create a time slot on a weekly basis to address the need to develop the relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, as well as providing wholesome instruction to single youths relating to marriage and sexual behaviour.

METHODS TO BE UTILISED

1. Home cell concept to be revisited to deal with some of the strategies presented.
2. Pastors to reconsider the whole format of house visitation to address teaching ministry.
3. Pastors to open files for each and every person who attends the church. This file will be utilised in the same way as a physician dealing with his patients.
4. Pastors to prepare teaching services aimed at family relationships to operate separately to the present bible Study and prayer meeting programme.
5. Pastors to provide an opportunity to train leadership in all departments to address the social needs of the community in the context of the specific department.
6. Pastors to ensure that all home cells and departments have sound doctrine and spiritual values at all times.
7. Pastors to see that services are inclusive to all members and outsiders.

SPECIFIC

This aspect needs to be dealt with in conjunction with each of the aspects presented earlier in this document. Many of the strategies and methods can be funded by the State.

It is suggested that this aspect should form part of a workshop with the regional overseers.