

**RESTORING AND INVOLVING BLACK SINGLE MOTHERS IN THE  
WHOLE CHURCH PROGRAM IN THE FULL GOSPEL CHURCH OF  
GOD IN SOUTH AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF DISTRICT THREE IN  
THE LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

BY

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DATE:

## DECLARATION STATEMENT

I Hasani Daniel Makhubele the undersigned hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or part thereof submitted it to any University or other Institution for any other study.

Signed

Student

Date

Hasani Daniel Makhubele: .....

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this article to my local church assemblies, namely, Charis Miracle Centre, based at Lombard, and Patmos Revelation Centre, at Altein. Also, to the District church leadership. May the Lord God Almighty, bless you, as you ponder through this humble document. Finally, I commend this paper to single mothers in the church world wide. God loves you.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The main research problem in this study is to investigate what strategies the local church should use to restore and involve single mothers in the whole church program, in the Full Gospel Church Of God, at District Three of the Limpopo Province.

The research findings reveal that single mothers are not fully involved in the whole church program; and also that in most cases they are discriminated against.

The suggested solution is that the church should follow the Bible examples and restore and involve single mothers in the whole church program.

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# CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction and background

This research will try to find out what rights and privileges black single mothers enjoy, in the Full Gospel Church Of God In South Africa amongst the black communities, at District three in the Limpopo Province. District three of the Full Gospel Church of God in South Africa is located in the Vhembe District. It covers places from Matiyani (Mhinga) to Vuwani , Venda and Musina.

According to the district's statistics given at the annual conference in October 2006, district three consists of 30 churches with 5950 members amongst whom 2670 (44, 9%) are single mothers.

Most of these single mothers are teenage mothers between 16 and 18 years, who come from poor backgrounds. Some of them are living in shacks and in squatter camps. For this research 15 principals of secondary schools and 20 pastors of the Full Gospel Church Of God in South Africa around these places have been contacted and they report that most of these girls are left home alone with their younger brothers and sisters, Anyone may understand that these young ladies are victims of teenage pregnancy resulting from deceits by men who take advantage of these poor girls, and give them a little amount of money, cheap clothes, cell phones, watches etc.

These girls become very loose and the community and the church are making efforts to redeem them. But unfortunately, even those who end up coming to church and repent of their past, face a terrible discrimination. Looking at it from a distance the group of teenagers, maybe between 16 and 18 years, that were singled out above are not mothers as such, but the church tends to look at them as single mothers because they have babies and have no husbands. So they are avoided by the youth and have either to force their way to mothers' meetings or stay aloof belonging nowhere.

Among these teenagers are those who carelessly have babies because of the government's child (social) grants. They look at other girls with babies who receive these grants and they are lured into it and spoil their future. The picture above is a very absurd. That's why if the church is not careful she may quickly become judgmental and

would like to have nothing to do with such groups. But is that the way the church should react?

The challenge here is that most of these single mothers are faced with rejection and discrimination in most of the local churches where they belong. The black community is traditionally suspicious of any single mother (Clinebell,1984: 232-233). They are generally suspected to be immoral or even to have somehow contributed to the death of their spouses. This is not basically the church issues. It is a traditional and cultural belief which unfortunately has found its way into the church because people somehow carry with them their manners and customs to the church (Pastor J.K. Shuma- personal communication, 16-12-2006).

Traditionally, any young woman who gets a baby outside marriage is regarded as immoral, irrespective of whether she was tricked and trapped into it or not (Wachenge, 1994: 74). Also, any woman who loses her husband, more- especially at the early age, her in-laws are highly suspicious and begin to ill-treat her. Even the victims of divorce are labeled to have wasted their marriage.

There are young ladies who before they got babies were wonderful assets of the church. But immediately it was discovered that they got babies outside marriage, they were dropped and forgotten instead of being assisted and restored. Also, there are young ladies who were very active in the church while their husbands were still alive, and immediately after the death of their spouses, they were forced to disappear from any noticeable service.

The way single mothers are treated also affects children from these families. As children grow and notice this kind of discrimination against their parents, they begin to lose interest in the church and become delinquents.

In most local churches it is reported that single mothers and widows' meetings are not included. Also when church councils (committees) are elected, the church is not comfortable if any of the single mothers is included. Most of the church members associate single mothers with loose morals (couples' meeting workshops held at Phalaborwa, 20-06-2008). Furthermore, support programs which are given to other structures such as the youth and couples, are lacking in most local churches. Single

mothers have obligation of raising their children alone. This is a stressful task, and support programs are needed to help. This would alleviate the tendency to get involved in outside marriage (illegitimate relationships).

Another report from the Annual General Council indicates that in most local churches single mothers are marginalized when tasks and spiritual responsibilities are allocated. For instance it is quite rare to find single mothers in the program to share the word of God or minister to others. It was reported that most church folks get embarrassed when a single mother has to stand before (in front of) them to minister (Annual General Council, 27.09.2008).

## **1.2 Research problem**

The problem statement defines the essence of the study and identifies the variable studied (Yount, 2006). It also helps limit the study by focusing the researcher's attention on the particular variables to be investigated.

The main research question in this research is: "What strategies should local churches use to restore single mothers and involve them in the whole church program in the Full Gospel Church Of God in South Africa in the Limpopo Province?" In order to answer this question the following sub questions will be asked:

1.2.1 What challenges are the pastors facing with regard to accommodating single mothers in the whole church program in the Full Gospel Church Of God in District three of the Limpopo province?

1.2.2 What is the attitude of the church as a whole towards single mothers' full participation in the whole church program?

1.2.3 What does the Bible teach with regard to single mothers and widows' treatment?

1.2.4 What role should pastors play to influence the local church to accommodate single mothers in the whole church program?

1.2.5 What support programs should be designed by the local church to give support to single mothers on how to raise their fatherless children?

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The purpose of this research is to determine what strategies may be used to restore and involve single mothers in the whole church program in the local church at the Full Gospel Church of God in South Africa in District three of Limpopo Province.

### **1.4 Significance of study**

This research will be significant because it aims at exposing the plight of single mothers in the black Full Gospel Church Of God in South Africa at District three in the Limpopo Province. It will also expose challenges facing pastors on how to deal with single mothers and young widows in this area. It will further bring to light the need that the church has, to come with strategies on how to restore and involve single mothers in the whole church program in the local church. It will also stimulate interest for further research in this area.

Also the church will treat single mothers in the way that they will feel a sense of belonging in their local churches. The findings of this study may sensitize churches and church leaders to engage in programs that will assist single mothers and enable them to get engaged in the whole local church program and participate actively and freely.

### **1.5 Design and Methodology**

1.5.1 Research and design: Qualitative approach

1.5.2 Population

1.5.3 Sampling

1.5.4 Data Collection

1.5.5 Data Analysis

15 local churches within district three of the Full Gospel Church Of God in the Limpopo Province will be visited and contacted and contact will be made with pastors and church elders to interview them on how they deal with the issues of single mothers and young widows in the local church.

Sisters' union (women organization) in the local church will also assist in supplying the information needed. This information will help bringing light concerning how single

mothers and young widows operate in the local church. Youth ministries will also supply valid information because amongst the youth there are girls with babies outside marriage. The research will try to find out what the constitution of the church says about the single mothers in the local church.

The churches will be selected as follows:

- One church based at Malamulele town.
- Five local churches in the rural communities in the former Gazankulu area.
- Five churches in the former Venda in the rural areas
- Two local churches in Thohoyandou and Shayandima (towns)
- Two local churches in Musina (one in the town and another in the rural settlement).

For the Biblical-Theological section the study will research on what the Bible says about single mothers, and also what the Bible says about the treatment of the less privileged in the church:

Here is the list of single mothers that will be studied as an example:

Hagar (Gen. 16: 1-15; 21: 1-19); Ruth (1:2-5; 2: 1-23; 3: 1-18; 4: 1-22); Rizpah (2Sam. 21:10); the widow of Zarephath (1King.17:8 ff); the (widow's oil) prophet's wife in debt (2King 4: 1-7); Rahab the harlot (Josh 2:8-20).

The following passages from both the NT and OT will be cited to illustrate what the Bible says concerning single mothers, widows, the alien and the fatherless.

Deuteronomy 10:18 "He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing." Deuteronomy 24:17-23 "Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge...." Isa 1:17 "Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow."

"This is the message you heard from the beginning. We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother (1 John 3: 11-12)."

“It is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband (1Cor 7: 1-2).”

“Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: it is good for them to stay unmarried as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion (1 Cor. 7: 8-9).

“Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches (1 Cor. 7: 17).

## **Sampling**

By the concept sampling is meant “to make a selection from the sampling frame in order to identify the people or issues to be included in the research (White, 2005: 114)”

Sampling of the churches will be done from 15 local churches (50%) in the district. The population to be interviewed will include 15 pastors, 15 single mothers, 15 married mothers, 15 youth leaders and 15 church elders.

Instruments for data collection will include:

Interview

Observation Schedules

The above data will serve to furnish the researcher with information indicating how different local Full Gospel Churches, in the Limpopo Province, district three, treat single mothers.

The study will compare the information (data), and also analysis to find out whether single mothers receive the same treatment as other mothers in the church. This will enable the researcher to find out whether the church offers adequate support to single mothers and help them how to bring up their fatherless children. From the data collected, enough evidence will be revealed as to whether the research problem is valid.

## **1.6 Limitation of the study**

While the researcher will be pursuing this design, he is aware that there are possible challenges that he may encounter. Some of the church folks he will interact with may not give accurate information he is looking for. Some of the single mothers may over exaggerate their fate because of self-pity, offence, anger and bitterness. Some pastors may not fully co-operate because of bias concerning how they themselves handle the issues of single mothers in their local churches.

Also some, pastors and church leaders may not want to divulge the information from their local churches because they regard it as strictly confidential. Another challenge is that some of the people may fail to supply information because they may not give themselves enough time to research on these issues for accurate feed-back.

## **1.7 Hypothesis**

The church should form support groups which will restore and encourage single mothers to get fully involved in the whole church program by involving them in different church structures such as sisters union, prayer groups, empowerment workshops and intercessory meetings.

## **1.8 Definitions**

According to Webster Comprehensive Dictionary, (1992), the word single refers to consisting of one only, separate, individual, having no companion or assistant, alone, unmarried state, consisting of one part. Hence a single mother is a female parent having no husband. In this research the concept "Single Mothers" refers primarily to young women (of 16-40 years) with children, but they never got married. In this category is found those who got babies with young men, who promised to marry them, and tricked them in to pre-marital sex, and never married them. The other category includes those young women who trapped some men into a pregnancy with the hope that they will marry them, while it was not the intention on the part of those men. Another group is those who before they became Christians committed fornication with either married men



or mere boys and had babies, and in most cases they end up in not knowing exactly who the father is. Others know the father to the child, but he does not take responsibility. Again in this category we find those with babies out of wed lock, and sometimes the father just compensates for maintenance or in most cases through legal pursuit. This also promotes promiscuity. So it happens in many cases that a mother may have children with different or unknown fathers.

The second group refers to young women (of about 20-40 years), who have lost their husbands through divorce, and have been left alone with children. Some of them continue with life and raise their children alone. But others may get involved with married men who give them more children and don't stay with them. Also, some of them become promiscuous.

The third group refers to young widows (aged between 20 and 40). Because of high death rate nowadays it is very common to find this group in the church. Some of them manage to face life and never get involved in sexual relationships anymore. But the majority gets involved in it and this promotes extra-marital affairs on the part of those men that get involved.

The word, "restore" means, to bring into existence or effect again, to bring back to a former or original condition, appearance, etc, to bring back or put back in a former place or position, reinstate (Webster Comprehensive Dictionary 1992).

To involve means to include, having a component part, to play a role and become part of.

## **1.9 Overview of the study**

Chapter 1 deals with introduction and background. It further highlights the formulation of the research problem and hypothesis. It also covers the significance of the study as well as the research design.

Chapter 2 presents literature review on the treatment of single mothers by the church. Firstly it focuses on the plight of the single mothers in the church world wide. Then it shifts its attention to the fate of black single mothers in the Full Gospel Church of God in South Africa at District three of the Limpopo province.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of the study with special reference to research design, population and sampling, data collection, validity, reality and data analysis.

Chapter 4 exposes the empirical findings and interpretation. It presents the situation as it is in the church concerning the treatment of single mothers.

Chapter 5 presents the theological perspective and the situation as it should be.

Chapter 6 presents the conclusion and recommendations for further research.

## **1.10 Conclusion**

This chapter presents a background to the study and researches on the strategies that may be used to restore and involve single mothers in the whole church program, in the Full Gospel Church Of God In South Africa at district three of the Limpopo Province. It focuses on the causes of single motherhood in the church and how they are treated. It also outlines the research question, objectives of the study, the research methodology, limitations and justification of the study. The following chapter will deal with literature review.

## **CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The researcher has consulted different literature (books, magazines, newspapers, news letters, thesis, statistical data and conference materials) which highlight different aspects of single motherhood; for instance factors contributing to singleness, the church's response to single mothers' needs, single mothers and loneliness, single motherhood regarded as immorality, the pain of single motherhood, single mothers and religious commitment, illusions concerning single motherhood and stereotyping of single mothers by the church.

Most of these literature materials stretch back a decade or less, with a few exceptional cases that may go back a decade and more. These are included for some crucial points that they highlight concerning the research topic. This literature review deals specifically with the way in which the church in general and the church leadership in particular deal with issues of single mothers in the local church. Different authors have exposed many challenges the church is faced with while trying to accommodate single mothers and involving them in the church program.

#### **2.1.1 The plight of single mothers in the church world wide.**

The researcher has read different literature covering the scope of the plight of single mothers in the church world wide. This literature review covers books written by different authors in different countries. It also includes different articles, magazines and conference materials. The researcher has also inter-acted with different church stakeholders with regard to the treatment of single mothers in the church world wide. The findings are revealed by the following information in the literature review below.

##### **2.1.1.1 Factors contributing to singleness**

The problem of single parent families is ever escalating. A larger percentage of this kind of family is headed by single mothers. There are many factors contributing to the mushrooming of single mothers in all the communities Research reveals some of these factors.

Today young couples hastily enter into a marriage with several options and even seriously discuss what should be done if the marriage breaks up. And when things go wrong with a relationship, the partners quit rather than wait and try to work things out. This causes the number of single mothers to keep on increasing. It is reported that since 1970 the population trend had been toward a steady increase in the number of single adults. In 1970 16,2 percent of the United States adult population had never been married. In 1991 22,6 percent of the population had never been married. Then if the number of the divorced and widowed is added to these statistics, then the total percentage of the singles becomes 38,6 percent, which is alarmingly very large (Clinebell, 1994; Pearson, 1998; Stewart, 2002; Fillipe, 2005).

The challenges of single motherhood have been showing their faces in all the centuries. But it seems like these challenges are now more rampant than in any time in the past. There are off course different causes for this state of affair.

Some of the most heard theories for increased singleness are the growing economic independence of women, the high rate of divorce, the increase in longevity, particularly in women who in the majority of cases tend to survive their husbands, more social acceptance of cohabitation outside a marriage commitment, more reliable birth control and sexual freedom which in most cases promotes promiscuity, and the emphasis on career achievements on the part of women (the so called women empowerment) (Athony & Koons, 1991).

Other reasons stated for the rise in number of the single mothers are teenage pregnancy, socio-economic, women being more self-supporting and thus less reliant on marriage for support, women' liberation movements, a desire to work towards reform and acceptance of singleness for freedom, men's feeling of an equality in marriage, believing they have only one option, and women at least three, increased options for adults; many things such as longer education, and acceptance of different norms, cohabitation, multiple sources of support and relationship burnout; and also single women not interested in a marriage commitment after suffering several failed relationship (Athony & Koons, 1991).

The above researchers both highlight very crucial issues that contribute to the sudden increase in the number of single mothers. They go to an extent of mentioning even those issues that many of the people are not even aware of.

According to U S Bureau of census, (1982: 20) single parent families have grown at a rapid rate over the past twenty years. Recent census figures illustrate the problem. Since 1970, the number of two parent household with children under eighteen actually declined by 4 percent. The number of one parent household maintained by males increased by 99 percent, while the single female parent household grew at a 105 percent rate.

The report continues to state that in 90 percent of single parent household, the mother is the custodian parent. (Single Adult ministry, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1987). This indicates that the area of greatest need in the single parent household is the mother- only family type. Following this report, it goes without saying that the local church cannot afford to ignore the single female parent.

Dycus, (1988: 61) reports that:

“A school official reported that the Dardanelle school district had 1 471 students enrolled in January 1990. By using the national projection for the percentage of children living in a single parent home by 1990, which is 44 percent, it was estimated that 650 school children lived in a mother only home.”

Most likely it is a combination of the above reasons that has contributed to the large increase in single mothers. This increase affects the church very negatively. The report that was given at the general conference held on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2008 at Impala (Limpopo), revealed that the ever increasing number of single mothers in the church comes with a serious challenge to the church in general, and the pastor in particular. Ministers agreed that a paradigm shift from the status quo in dealing with these cases is a necessity. This necessitates a serious training for the church leadership. Because all the researchers cited above agree that there is a severe escalation of single mothers, particularly those who are still young; ranging between the ages of 30-40, and still having children under 18, the church must come with some strategies to eliminate these causes.

Different researchers are now looking at the problem of the increase of the number of single mothers in a different perspective.

Arguing about the mushrooming of single mothers, (Stewart, 2002, and Fillipe, 2005) point out that the current crises in marriage constitute a major challenge for the church because Christianity emphasizes the holiness of marriage. Any sexual activity outside marriage is deemed illicit. They go on to argue that however in most communities marriage has ceased to be a social norm. In this case there happens to emerge a social gap that puts people in a serious dilemma, more-especially the church folk.

In a way these researchers are also suggesting that the church should come with different mechanisms to deal with the challenge of single parent families.

The high cost of living is another factor that contributes much to the rise in the number of single mothers. Millions of young people no longer get married not because they hate marriage, but because they cannot afford the abusively high price of “ilobolo” (the payment of bride wealth, or dowry). Many parents charge high amount of money, and thus disadvantage the poor young men who cannot afford it. This causes abnormal proliferation of the number of single mothers. As a result most modern African families, including poor single parent families, are becoming increasingly unable to provide adequate care and support for their family members.

This further leads to pre-marital pregnancies, child abuse and neglect, increased numbers of street children, prostitution, and a tendency towards marital infidelity (Suda, 1996:78).

Increased poverty, sexual permissiveness and growing number of single mothers in Africa have encouraged many people to look outside their marriage for sexual fulfillment. Outside wives and outside children are prevalent in contemporary Africa, (Karanja, 1997).

One can agree with the researcher who says:

“Some outside wives are divorcees who may have been abused and neglected by their previous husbands and thus are happy to be enjoying the affection and attention of other women’ husbands who may have restored their dignity and help them regain self-confidence (Suda, 1997:79).”

The escalation of the number of single mothers in the church is astounding and astonishing. There is no hope for the number declining because life outside is becoming worse day by day. According to The Teacher (2007: 8) D Phiippe (2005), indicates that in 1969 R.D. Coertze reported that 55 percent of births in Atteridgeville, Pretoria were illegitimate. In the late 1970s and early 80s 60-80 percent of hospital births were reported to be of young unmarried women of whom 50 percent were still learners (at school). In 1986, according to the same research, 40 percent of the households around Mpumalanga included illegitimate children, who were grandchildren to single mothers. In other words, single mothers' daughters have become single mothers too. A decade later, this problem increased terribly. For instance, the department of education disclosed the alarming escalation of teenage pregnancy that made headlines last year. More than 72000 girls aged between 13 and 19 did not attend school because they were pregnant. Official figures from the provincial department of education reveal that 5868 learners in Kwazulu-Natal and 1748 in the Free State fell pregnant Last year. About 5000 pregnancies were reported in Limpopo, while Gauteng recorded 2542 in the past two years (The Teacher, 2007: 8).

The big problem is that we have so many missing fathers. Countless families in South Africa are single-parent families headed by a mother or a grand-mother and there are even child-headed families (The Teacher, 2009: 9).

According to Dorothy Payne, (1983) "like everyone else, single women have come to their own present place in life through their own conscious choices, partly through psychological reasons." She adds: "because women are such varied individuals, there are many different reasons why they are single, in a society that expects adult women to be married." So Dorothy concludes that there are three reasons that render women single. She states that they are single through choice, through external and psychological circumstances.

Most African American women are single mothers because there are few men ready for marriage. Most black American men are either married, involved with someone else or lack commitment to marriage. Another factor that may lead to men not being available for marriage is intimidation. Educated women in most cases, who have secure jobs and

are seriously devoted Christians tend to be threats to most black men (Spann, 1996; Payne, 1983).

A survey conducted by Ipsos Markinor in 2008 compares South African statistically to a village of 100 people. According to this research, out of every 100 people in South Africa, 39 are married, 9 are living together; 7 are widowed; 2 are divorced, and 43 are single. From the fore-going information, the number of single people far surpasses any of the other groups. One may be tempted to ask as to how many churches ever focus on the singles, or provide forums for the single mothers to feel included in life and business of the church (Joy, 2009).

Close to home, Michigan's 1990 census report shows that among the African American women, 74 percent are single. This study also reveals that 67 percent of the African American women are single mothers with the sole responsibility of heading their families with children under the age of 18. The report further indicates that the number of single mothers in America is increasing in a surprising rate. With the rising divorce rate now over 40 percent, the present number of singles will increase to 52 percent by the year 2000 (Spann, 1996).

A number of causes account for the escalation of the number of single mothers, and these include death, divorce, separation, desertion, illegitimacy and less considered factors such as military service and penal incarceration. Another problem is that many are questioning the institution of marriage itself nowadays, and are considering other options (Parsley, 1990).

### **2.1.1.2 The church's response to single mothers' needs (discrimination)**

The church is not responding adequately to the needs of single mothers and their children. Sensitivity to single mothers is a problem that should be taken seriously because many single mothers report that they've stopped attending church because of jokes and fun made of them They point out that churches have unconsciously bought into the belief that being single is being miserable (Mbugwa, 1998; Lauren,2001; Farrington, 2001; Trent,2001)



This problem experienced by single mothers as stated in the literature above, is the same problem that the black community church, including the Full Gospel Church of God in South Africa in the Limpopo province is facing. According to the report given by the district over seer at the district council held at Karibu on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July, 2009, the Full Gospel Church of God is seriously faced with the challenge of coming with a new strategy in order to deal more effectively with problems facing pastors and the church leadership, concerning single mothers.

The district over seer pointed out that he keeps on receiving complains from local churches that are addressing single mothers' problems. These problems were from both the church leadership, and single mothers themselves. Single mothers complain that they are being neglected and ridiculed by the church, while the leaders justify themselves by saying that single mothers are not easily manageable. This report concurs with the findings by many researchers globally. The Full Gospel church of God in Limpopo is faced with the challenges of the increase of the number of single mothers as well. This makes it very difficult for the church leadership to give them proper care and to accommodate them in the whole church program.

Research reveals that the challenges of single mothers in the church, is a universal problem. Pastors and church leaders also testify to this fact. It seems like there is a great misunderstanding as to how the church must treat single mothers.

The question of single mothers is very challenging. For instance one out of every three American children is born to a single mother. Most single mothers over forty indicate that the most difficult part of their lifestyle is considering that their current situation may be permanent, and that they seldom get invited out to social events. And on the odd occasion when they ever get invited, they go alone and feel like a wallflower with a fake smile. Many single mothers, confirm this truth, and even confess that they often cry all the way home. They also feel unwanted (Williams, 2006; Joy, 2008)."

Single mothers complain that most of the times they hate attending any function. They even decline invitations that require a partner. Some single mothers point out that they are often insecure, clingy and miserable. One woman exclaims: "the worst thing for me

is to attend a wedding. This is because of the sorrow I experienced as a result of failure in my own marriage. (Joy, 2008: 73).”

The society up to now has not adopted singleness as an acceptable norm or lifestyle. The church too shares the same attitude. The church has adopted the world’s definition which suggests hurt, rejection and even self-hatred among the singles. The divorced in some churches are looked upon with indifference. The friends and support systems they once had are no longer there. The groups that they were once a part of as a couple no longer accept them, and rarely are they encouraged to participate in church ministries (Munroe, 1992; Spann, 1996).

Both the above authors agree strongly that the problem of single mothers is rendered worse not only because they are faced with grieving the lost or facing frustrated relationships, but because they are also faced with the responsibility of raising up children alone, with no other help..

Speaking of the marginalization of single mothers by the church, Spann (1996) has this to say:

“Years of conditioning in the church have subconsciously manipulated and marginalized singles by prioritizing the role that couples and families play within the church. Even leadership structures are seemingly not cognizant of singles. Many single mothers find themselves in churches that are so family-oriented in their liturgies, homilies, activities, and budgets that they feel ignored and overlooked (Spann, 1996; Slone, 1992).”

The church may be contributing towards making single mothers feel guilty and inferior when she does not understand the nature of their challenge and problem area. As a result these single mothers often leave the church or become mobile (Neiman, 1986; Spann, 1996; Joy, 2009).

Single mothers are not experiencing love or at least an assimilation or acceptance where they need it, in the house of God “The implication of the above prognosis for an institution such as the church are enormous.” “The patterns of worship and programs will require a radical shift away from the traditional nuclear family (Spann, 1986; Slone, 1992).

The church may be contributing towards making single mothers feel guilty, when they do not understand the nature of their problems. Single mothers' families have been rendered vulnerable and it has been difficult for the family church to accept them as families because they tend to identify them with sin and sinful behavior (Parseley, 1990; Spann, 1996).

Both Spann and Parseley agree that the church has some serious problems dealing with single mothers.

A stigma exists, which gives a single mother the feeling of being cursed. Because of this, anger frustration, guilt, repression, and anxiety have often accompanied this feeling. Single mothers likely thought God was far from them because churches appeared uninterested in them (Parseley, 1990).

From the fore-going argument it goes without saying that the church is really faced with the challenge of teaching the leadership to consider some strategies that may cater for the inclusion of single mothers in the entire church program. This is the out cry of the Full Gospel church of God amongst the black community in the Limpopo Province.

Single mothers need fellowship, nurturing, caring and spiritual guidance. They need a place where they can feel as if they belong and also need support from other people with whom they can share similar problems and concerns (Spann, 1996).

In a two parent family-oriented church, a single mother might be considered a living reminder of the fragility of family life. A strong possibility existed that mother-only families made local churches feel uncomfortable. Local churches have designed programs with two parent families as their model. But Wood sees it differently. He says: "It is biblical to love persons wherever they happen to be rather than if they move to the spot we have designed for them (Wood, 1997: 22-23)."

In 1985, the census Bureau estimated there were twelve million single parents in the United States. Slightly over half of these parents had children under the age of eighteen living in the home. A number of causes accounts for their creation, including death, divorce, separation, desertion, illegitimacy, and less considered factors, such as military service and penal incarceration.

All the researchers agree that single mothers present a serious challenge to the church. They agree that single mothers and their children are people of great value, and that they are worthy of sound relationship.

According to T.B Maston, (1983:19-40) the biblical family is to promote the kingdom of God on earth and to provide understanding, love, and the companionship for its members. The church is to be a place of support and safety for all its members. Single mothers need this kind of support because they are overwhelmed by parental duties (Maston, Tillian, 1983).

Maston further indicates that single mothers have been wounded by death, divorce, desertion, and all the other causes of their parental status. He continues to say that single mothers' families have been rendered vulnerable in the process of becoming one parent homes. Like the other researchers cited above, Maston asserts that it has been very difficult for the Family oriented church to accommodate and acknowledge the single mothers as genuine members of the church, with the rights to fully participate in the entire church program.

Inability to separate sin from the sinner causes rejection of single mothers by the local church. Many single parent homes were created by divorce. This makes the situation to become worse because divorce is unacceptable to the church. Some researchers argue that the church should learn to separate a sinner from sin. Also, the church should promote biblical forgiveness.

Ensworth, (1982: 21), states that "we are required by the Bible to come alongside of people who hurt, and offer them the redemptive healing grace of God." He goes on to say that we are also required to find ways of understanding the needs and concerns confronting the single adult women and lead them into reconciliation rather than alienation.

As a pastor you cannot help thinking: What can I do about all this? Is it in my powers to change the thinking of these people?

Wood, (1977: 20-23) believes that it is important for the church to start fresh ministries for single adults. This according to Wood will help single mothers to understand that they are regarded as important in the church and that they too have a peer group of

their own. Wood therefore pushes for careful selection of leaders for single mothers in the local church (Wood, 1977).

Local churches failed to emerge as resources for the single parent. This started way back in the 1960s. But even today the condition of the single parent has not changed. The modern local church should take initiative to accommodate this peculiar family unit. The treatment that single mothers receive in the church is a clear indication that this family segment is being neglected (Wood, 1977 Bustanoby, 1985; Dycus, 1988).

Local churches are attempting to respond to the recent phenomenon of the numerical decline of the two parent household. Researchers suggest that less than one third of all families will fit that pattern in 1990. There are several hundred homes in every community with only one parent and they are not being reached by the local church (Dycus, 1988).

#### **2.1.1.3 Single mothers and loneliness**

Single mothers live in a very lonely place. They need somebody with programs which are about instilling hope, forgiveness, prayer, and tapping into the power of God to bind up the broken heart and use it for God's glory. The marginalization of single mothers in the church is a universal issue. Most single mothers have as a result lost confidence facing life and this also affects their capacity to render their maximum services in the church.

They feel like they don't fit in and are being condemned or rejected by their fellow church members. The discouragement is sometimes so severe that they cease attending worship services (Laurie, 2006, Wachenge, 1994).

Something must be done to transform the male mind set toward women. Males must realize that females also have the same dignity as themselves. Dr Miles Munroe, (1992:30) indicates some of these attitudes in men that need a paradigm shift. He highlights the negative impact that these attitudes have on females, particularly single mothers.

Miles, (1992, and Michelle, 2005) argue that the status and image of women is threatened by their male counter parts, more so if the woman is single. Some people

overlook the fact that women were created to fulfill their destiny in divine moment after divine moment for as long as they live, single or otherwise. When they pass away it will be their contributions that will be noted, not their marital status (Michelle, 2005; Munroe, 1992).

Munroe, (1992:32) says “no one was born to be married; however, everyone was born not to be alone. There is no special anointing that comes with marriage”. He goes on to say: “Unmarried Christians should be consumed by God and His will, so pre-occupied and committed to finding out who they are in Him ( Munroe,1992: 36). The same author humorously says that the word disciple is more important to God than spouse. In a way he is trying to encourage single Christians to feel accepted and wanted to the church because God is not necessarily impressed by marital status, but by the heart condition whether married or not.

Single mothers in most cases get deeply frustrated. There are experiences that single mothers go through that may even lead to them being hurt, grieved and deeply wounded to an extent where they disappear and finally leave the church. When confronted, these single mothers confess that they feel out of place in the family-oriented church. Some of them indicate that they are so stressed and confused because of trying to earn a living, and raising teenage children on their own (Anderson, 1990; Doug Self, 1990).

Single mothers are broken in spirit, heart-sore, disillusioned and often starved socially for genuine wholesome fellowship.

Many often suffer from a low-self concept, low-self esteem, and a lack of motivation. They can't find it easy to trust anyone who has not faced the same plight as them. Single mothers need fellowship, nurturing, caring and spiritual guidance because they face rejection, remorse, guilt, shame, aloneness, low self-esteem and often loveless lives (Spann, 1996; Bill, 1983).

To emphasize their loneliness Spann, (1996), says: “On occasion you may see a small number of them in the pews of a local church, sitting alone, or with young children.” Spann goes on to explain that single mothers are in most cases very few and lonely in

the church because they are not made to feel accepted or included in the mainstream of the church program.

Single mothers are calling the whole church to include them to show that the church is composed of both young and old, black and white, handicapped, healthy, male and female, educated and ignorant, rich and poor, married and single (Bill, 1983).

Depression, anxiety, and low self-worth are common among single mothers. These emotions have probably driven them away from churches and married couples, and other helping groups. Single mothers have been wounded by death, divorce, desertion, and all other causes of their parental status. Their families have been rendered vulnerable, and it has been difficult for the family church to accept them as families, because they tend to identify them with sin and sinful behavior (Parsely, 1990).

In one of the conferences held in Texas, (USA) it was reported that 95 percent of the attendants, agreed that single mothers are found to be more lonely and miserable than their married counter-parts. It was also agreed that most single mothers have severe financial pressures (Parsely, 1990).

Single motherhood is an experience that contains some crucial and stormy transitions. Facing life alone after divorce or violent death, or being deceived by a man and left with a fatherless child; and establishing one's own identity to make appropriate decisions is a serious challenge. So the church tends to become stereotyped and conclude that single mothers cannot become productive in the church, in spite of their efforts to prove both to the church and the world that they have all it takes to be successful and productive in life. Therefore single adult ministry is a growing area of concern within the church today (Sheey, 1996; Koons & Athony, 1991).

#### **2.1.1.4 Single motherhood regarded as immorality**

Wachenge, (1994: 91) points out that in every ethnic community in Kenya mothers had the primary responsibility to ensure that their daughters maintained sexual purity. Adolescent girls were advised to uphold sexual morality until they got married and were ready to raise a family. Such advice was based on the premise that sexual morality, in general, and pre-marital virginity in particular, were highly valued. "Single motherhood

was viewed as immoral and brought disgrace not only on the girl but also on her entire family and the community as a whole (Wachenge,1994).

Mothers were charged with the responsibility of supervising their daughters. They had to make sure that they strictly instill moral conduct on their daughters. If a girl conceives out of wedlock, both the mother and the daughter were looked with contempt and both were disgraced. Today these moral standards are being ignored, swept away and distorted by modern thinking, resulting in a moral vacuum and a break down of proper family life. Pre-marital pregnancies and divorces are rampant in contemporary Africa and public perceptions of them have changed drastically (Wachenge, 1994)

Society has labeled single mothers with disrepute. They are stigmatized as being undesirable, having loose morals, swingers, selfish and irresponsible. A stigma exists, which gives a single mother the feeling of being cursed. Because of this, anger, frustrations, guilt, repression, and anxiety have often accompanied this feeling (Parsely, 1990; Spann, 1996).

This bias by the church against single mothers is a wide spread phenomena. The Full Gospel church of God in South Africa is not exceptional. This problem was detected also in the black community churches in the Limpopo Province.

The researcher interacted with about 20 pastors around these black community churches where he discovered that the struggle is indeed there about accepting single mothers and involving them in the whole church program.

#### **2.1.1.5 The pain of single motherhood**

Speaking about the pain of becoming a widow, Krent, (2003: 113) says "...and I began an unexpected journey. I became a widow. It hasn't been easy. I stumble badly, up one day and down the next." She goes on to say: "After more than five years of widowhood I do still long for someone to park my car and dine with me (Krent, 2003: 113)."

Women comprise over 50 percent of the population in Africa and are the majority of worshipers in the church. "Many women do not participate in the decision making process within the church, more-specially single mothers (Kayonga, 1992: 145)."



According to Clinebell (1994: 232), “divorce is one of the most widespread grief experiences. Divorce often happens early in the marriage when children are still at home, thus affecting young children.

Describing the condition of some single mothers, Nancy Leigh Demos, (2002: 15) says:

“But we see the poisoned fruit of the revolution in the eyes and pitiable cries of women who are drowning in the quagmire of serial divorce and remarriage and wayward children; women who are much exhausted from the demands of trying to juggle one or more jobs, function as single parents and be active at church; women who are disoriented and confused, who lack a sense of mission, vision and purpose for their lives and who are perpetually, pathetically shrouded in wounded ness, self doubt, resentment, and guilt.”

Violet death affects Christian women as any woman in the world who experiences it, but the pain becomes much more unbearable to the Christian woman who faces rejection as well. The pain becomes worse and unbearable when the church fails to give maximum support. In most cases the reaction of the church members renders the pain more unbearable when they fail to offer help and display positive attitude to the survivors of the trauma caused by violet death (Vining, 2003; Brown, 1991).

Single mothers have a myriad of needs. This variety of family, namely, single parent family, presents a serious challenge to the local church. Depression, anxiety, and low-self esteem and self-worth are common among single mothers. These emotions have most probably driven them away from churches and other helping groups. This isolation sometimes provokes a serious emotional obstacle, and loneliness. Friendship and compassion in a non-threatening fellowship can become an answer for these emotional and relational needs. The church leadership should know that it is the duty and responsibility of the church to take care of single mothers and the widows. If the church should really show that they care, single mothers also would feel accepted and comfortable in the church. This would build their confidence and self esteem. Stress and depression bought by loneliness and rejection would be minimized or even completely overcome.

It is said that one single mother went to the pastor for counseling as she was struggling with the pain of single motherhood. This woman had divorced her husband who was an alcoholic and also abused her physically. But after divorce she couldn't bear the pain

and confessed that she misses the husband very badly. Single mothers often confess that there's no way to fill an emptiness brought about by death or divorce. That's why both the victims of divorce, widows and those who were rejected even at pre-marriage need much care and strong support to survive (Vining, 2003; Brown, 1991; Kassian, 2002).

Miles Munroe (1992:36) advises that victims of divorce, widows and single mothers who never married, need someone to caution them that separation is just an event, an incident. It is not the end of one's life. Even the death of the beloved one does not mean that the survivor must die too. This kind of care will ensure single mothers that God is with them and that He cares (Munroe, 1992).

Many young women get divorced and left with the responsibility of raising the children on their own. Some of the children may be handicapped. It occurs that some may get to drugs as well, exacerbating the pain of the mother. In this case the mother gets so depressed and feels unwanted and rejected by her community and the church.

One woman was deeply unhappy after she had organ transplants and was also divorced at the age of 40. She almost died of depression. She only survived as a result of the support she received from the church. They ministered to her and helped her accept to face life without her husband, and also in spite of her ill-health. The victims of divorce confess that you can never get over the pain. They say the pain is always there (Larson, 1990; Doug Self, 1990).

Larson (1990: 112) goes on to say that single mothers need role models for that kind of vulnerability- pastors and church leaders who will risk sharing their pain and their past experiences." This kind of support," says Larson, "will encourage the victims to share their pains and to minister to one another."

The pain suffered by single mothers is mostly exacerbated by their struggle with feelings of guilt and rejection by their fellow Christians. Also, general anxiety, worries about finances, questions about legal obligations, a loss of hope about the future, and a host of other concerns, especially if there are children still very young to be taken care of. Most single mothers become depressed, lonely, and often unproductive. There is no other human experience more traumatic than a divorce. The emotional effect is so

unbearable, the physical toll so astounding, the spiritual impact immobilizing, and the social cost is self-inflicted isolation and low self-esteem (Munroe, 1992; Spann, 1996).

Divorce is in simple terms a tragedy that has plagued society in epidemic proportion. It has also found its ugly way into the church. The scars of divorce manifest themselves like open wounds oozing with hurt, bitterness, hatred, anger and disillusionment. Single mothers are left not only to grieve the death or rejection of a spouse; or a significant relationship, but they are left with the responsibility of raising the children. They feel like they are in a maze without any way out, facing also lack of paternal involvement, emotionally, socially or financially. They struggle with shame, guilt and lack of trust in men (Munroe, 1992; Spann, 1996; Larson, 1990).

#### **2.1.1.6 Single mothers and religious commitment**

Divorced and widowed women, including single mothers who never married, tend to be more highly religious and committed than those settled in marriage. Most studies show that most people continue to adhere to their religious belief during and after divorce. Therefore pastors and counselors can look beyond the fact that divorce is a sin and see it more as a result of sin and brokenness (Barna, 1993; Vining, 2003).

So we can learn to hate sin, but love the sinner by offering hope to those who have found themselves in a troubled or broken marriage. This is where the pastor can step in and fill a vital role. The local church has a tremendous role and opportunity to minister to the needs of a segment of society who is often left alone to navigate through one of the most devastating crises of their lives. The church leadership should recognize the pain of the divorced and single mothers and offer love and acceptance, instead of avoidance and rejection. The church should show mercy (Barna, 1993; Vining, 2003).

Single mothers are not without hope at all. A certain widow highlights some amazing skills she has picked up along the way as a widow. She indicates that she can read directions and use a screwdriver. In this way she emphasizes that there's something else to be gained by being single. It is thrilling to hear this widow saying: "I have time. A scarce commodity, it seems... I am free to offer rides to those who need it, and also to accommodate visitors in a more hospitable manner than ever before (Krent, 2003: 113)."

Maheney (2002: 24) says: "But God has a plan for me, and I know He will send the proper friend at the proper time." Surely God cares for all the people, whether they are single or married.

Some widows have talents that they can use for the glory and the kingdom of God. Many pastors indicate that most of the big church projects are funded and accomplished by business single mothers. The report goes on to indicate that it is not only in the context of marriage that women can express their femininity. They don't have to wait until they reach the marriage altar to give full expression to their femininity.

All women are called to display their femininity in a variety of relationships (Maheney, 2002). In her own words Maheney, (2002: 24) encouraging single women to enjoy (appropriately) being a helper in these differing relationships with men, and trust God for their future, says:

"I encourage you to be at peace in this season. If the Lord has marriage planned for you, then you can rest assured that He is also the perfect matchmaker. It was God who said it is not good for a man to be alone... God is the one who made man aware of his need for a woman."

Maheney (2002: 24) assures single women that resting in this truth will free them from the temptation to manipulate, complain, or become bitter. They will begin to realize that there is still a godly call on their lives. She mentions that many single mothers she knows have created warm, appealing homes and practice hospitality. Others are interested with crafts. She concludes by saying that marital status has mostly to do with their feminine desire and capacity to create a warm, inviting home (Maheney, 2002).

According to Yoder, (1985: 407-408), single mothers have a special opportunity in the Christian community.

"Christian single mothers have the opportunity to be the troublesome and graceful reminders to the church and to the world that life cannot be lived well if loneliness is not accepted. A single mother in the church can possibly embody the truth that all members are people, and that they are unique individuals. The fact that every person is a separate, solitary individual can help bring understanding to the church that everyone is called to respond to God in his own unique way (Yoder, 1985)."

Yoder believes that to be whole is to be in the community; to be whole is to be able to stand alone. Thus, according to Yoder, the state of singleness provides a great

opportunity to express the wholeness and particularity of God's creation in the particular individual (Yoder, 1985).

#### **2.1.1.7 Illusions in the twenty-first century church concerning single mothers.**

The illusions are the overly romanticizing and idealistic nature of the single mothers in the church. Single motherhood is being applauded in the circular world. This brings about confusion in the church that focuses on the Bible with regard to the family institution. Hayes (1970) appeals for the authority of the scripture in order to avoid becoming like the society. The church as a whole calls for the Bible to be the central guiding principle in the goals of Christian education, which leads to the preparation of Christian motherhood, i.e. inside the wed lock. Hayes goes on to emphasize Christological imperatives, which simply promote the fact that motherhood should be founded on the word of God- purity and chastity being a norm to be observed at all cost (Hayes, 1970; Sheey, 1976).

The life and future of single mothers are influenced and dictated by the church, family culture and the prevailing attitudes of the community as a whole. "One of the terrifying aspects of the twenties is the conviction that the choices we make are irrevocable (Sheey, 1976: 123)." The church's concern about the holiness of single mothers is an overly exaggerated fear. A strong look at most of the single mothers will show that many decisions made at some times have later been integrated with other decisions to form very different realities. These illusions about single motherhood are not always negative. These illusions provide the power essential to infuse their first commitments with excitement and intensity, and to sustain them in their commitment as Christians as long enough to gain them some experience in life (Sheey, 1976).

Another danger lies in that the average Christian views single mothers as sexually frustrated and that they are prone to engage in deviant behavior. Also, marriage is regarded as God's highest calling for all men and women (Koons & Athony, 1991)."

#### **2.1.1.8 Stereotyping of single mothers by the church**

A large problem in ministering to single mothers in the local church is that of stereotyping. Often people's perceptions or ideas of single mothers are uninformed,

ignorant, or prejudiced by the image usually portrayed against single mothers by the church folk. The average Christian tends to conclude that single mothers are basically unhappy, somewhat undependable and independent. There is a tendency to believe that single mothers are intellectually stimulating and sexually available. Also, single mothers are suspected to have contributed to their singleness, and have been accused to be irresponsible and selfish. They are not to be trusted and it is said that they spend most of their time with other singles, hence furthering their hidden agenda (Peterson, 1984).

This way of looking at single mothers has been detrimental to the church. Another common and dangerous misconception is one held by many married people in the church.

This is the idea that marriage is considered the goal of life. People need to grow into maturity to overcome these misconceptions. A concern was voiced out at the regional council of the Full Gospel Church of God in South Africa, held at Karibu near Tzaneen, in Limpopo on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July, 2009, that many married women in the church, regard single mothers as a threat. It was reported that most married women express their fear that single mothers are a potential danger to their marriage and the image of the church. One woman even indicated that pastors also are liable to falling if they are not careful, because during the process of counseling, they may be trapped into unhealthy relationships by single mothers.

This shows us the dilemma of the church and its leadership. While these researchers show sympathy towards single mothers, they also sound an alarm warning the church and the leadership to be cautious dealing with single mothers.

#### **2.1.1.9 Single mothers' development**

Koons & Athony, (1991: 27) have pointed out the lack of empirical data available on single mother's development. Highlighting this issue, they say:

“The early theorists, including Freud, Jung, Erickson, and Piaget, omitted research on the single adult. Havighurst bases his theory of adult development, on the marriage model; five of the eight tasks he assigns to early adulthood require a marriage relationship to grow into a “healthy” young adult. Lovinson's model is based on male development, omitting at least half

of the singles population, and his theories are based on the experiences of men who were married or divorced (Carolyn,A, Koons and Michael, J Athony, 1991).”

The above findings enhance the fact that single mothers are faced with the possibilities of differing life experiences, such as maturity levels responsibilities, financial stability and family support. So the church has found it difficult to ascribe specific “need” or “tasks” to single mothers. Many books however, have been written on how single mothers can make it in life, or how they can find a partner. However, this admonishment is usually undermining single mothers, more-specially those who tend to assume that being a single mother is abnormal and is therefore unacceptable (Fischer, 1989).

#### **2.1.1.10 Single mothers and independence**

Single mothers enjoy a certain degree of freedom and independence. One strong lifestyle choice made by single mothers is how to spend their money. A tremendous economic fit that single mothers command on the marketing context is very remarkable. The marketing agencies have consequently now focused again much of their efforts on the single mothers. This is among other things revealed in areas such as housing, food, banking, retail, and many others. Single mothers are also more likely to own homes of their own, buy shares, purchase items of great luxury and to go out on trips of great magnitude (Koons & Athony, 1991).

Another thing noted about single mothers is their ability to make friendships. In describing their feelings about their sexual relationships single mothers agree that their sexual activity is within the confines of a significant relationship. They say this kind of relationship saves them from the feeling of guilt, about having sex with someone to whom they are not married (Athony & Koons, 1991; Fischer 1991).

The above-mentioned researchers indicate that single mothers are concerned that they cannot find more respectable places to socialize. They are however very comfortable with their single status and lifestyle. Accompanying this theory, is that continued need to feel useful and acceptable, and even the sense of knowing where they are headed to and why is their major concern.

## **2.2 The fate of black single mothers in the Full Gospel Church Of God in South Africa at district three in the Limpopo province**

While investigating the plight of single mothers in the church world wide, the researcher found it easy to obtain written documents of various kinds to describe the position of single mothers in the church. But the information touching single mothers and their fate amongst the black community churches in district three, the researcher relied on conference materials, workshops and also interviewing different church leaders.

The observations made by the researcher reveal that black single mothers are faced with the same challenges as is happening world wide. The majority of church members consulted by the researcher indicate that the attitude of the church towards single mothers is the same everywhere. For instance, pastor M of one of the black Full Gospel Church Of God at district three says: “The number of single mothers in our churches is escalating. Every year we happen to lose a great number of men in our district, and most of them happen to affect us because they are husbands to our church members even though some of them are not our members themselves.”

After a lengthy discussion with this pastor, he went on to say: “What bothers me is that the church is still so traditional bound and keep on discriminating against single mothers. In most of our local churches single mothers are not accepted. This makes them to feel inferior and unwanted.”

Single mothers themselves testify that they are being marginalized. Some of them have already accepted the fate in the sense that they no longer have any interest to participate in the church program. They reveal that it is very rare to find a single mother serving in a key position in the church. One single mother said: “the only time you can hear a single mother mentioned is when she has to account for some nasty accusation. The church is so suspicious of single mothers that even if there is no evidence to prove her guilt, the church will insist that she is not living right.”

Some single mothers indicate that the problem is promoted by pastors who fail to teach their congregations properly how to treat single mothers. Others blame pastors' wives whom they say are highly suspicious of single mothers, and that they are over protective towards their husbands.



The above observations do not differ from the findings obtained by the researcher in the literature study.

## **2.3 Conclusion**

From the above literature review, it is quite evident that the challenges faced by the church, concerning single mothers and their role in the church are vast. All the writers quoted above highlight the fact that it is very difficult to deal with the positions and experiences of single mothers in the church. They all emphasize the need for support to these victims of fate.

They also indicate that the church cannot claim to have a ready-made solution dealing with these issues. However, the church is encouraged not just to look and lament at the situation. Strategies should be sought out and efforts made to deal with these burning and hurting issues. Global awareness and interest is surfacing now for the attention that should be given to single mothers, not only in the church, but also in the temporal world.

The Full Gospel church of God in South Africa, in the Limpopo province, has also shared the same experience. The researcher hopes to bring and enhance the awareness which the fellow researchers have already brought to light; in order to help restore and involve single mothers in the whole church program. What the researcher has already observed is that the black community churches of the above-mentioned denomination, is faced with a serious challenge. The influence which these communities have, in the church, are both cultural and traditional. It is very difficult to convince the church leadership to shift from the status quo.

The following chapter will deal with the research methodology and data collection.

## **CHAPTER 3 DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter the researcher intends to explain how data for this research was collected, captured and analyzed. The data include both primary and secondary data. With the permission from the district overseer and local pastors, the researcher conducted field work in the sampled churches where his primary target was the church leadership and single mothers. Pastors also played a major role providing the information and helping organize workshops. The co-operation was excellent.

### **3.2 The approach used: The qualitative approach**

Because this study is ethnological in nature, the researcher will follow the qualitative approach. The concept ethnology refers to the science of the subdivisions and families of men, their origins, characteristics, behavior, etc. (Webster Comprehensive Dictionary, 1992). This study concerns people's behavior and it is therefore ethnological. The qualitative approach simply means a description of the behavior of people in a particular society (White, C.J, 2005).

The researcher will conduct unstructured interview, and focus group interviews using a qualitative approach. This is because according to White, C.J, (2005), interview is the most efficient and convenient instrument that can be used to collect data, particularly when one is researching on human response.

According to Tuckman, as cited by Cohen and Manion (1991: 243), an interview "provides access to what is inside a person's head, makes it possible to measure what a person knows, (knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences), and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs)."

In this case the researcher will meet, interview and observe sampled congregation members in the Full Gospel Church Of God in district three, in the Limpopo Province. The research is conducted amongst the black communities. In his observations the researcher will focus on the behavior (attitudes) of sampled local church members, namely pastors and the church leadership of different structures, e.g. sisters' union, the

local church council and the youth. He investigates how they treat single mothers with regard to involving them in various church activities. Further more the study investigates if the local church in the Full Gospel Church Of God, amongst the black communities do have support groups structures in place which restore, encourage and engage single mothers to get fully involved in the whole church program, e.g. sisters' union, prayer groups, empowerment workshops and intercessors' meetings.

### **3.3 Definition of concepts and abbreviations**

According to Webster Comprehensive Dictionary (1992), the word single refers to consisting of one only, separate, individual, having no companion, consisting of one part. Hence a single mother is a female parent having no husband.

In this research project the concept "single mothers" refers primarily to young women (of 16-40 years) with children outside the wedlock. Secondly to young women (of about 20-40 years) who have been divorced or lost their husbands through death, and were left with fatherless children.

The word restore means to bring into existence or effect again, to bring back to a former or original condition, appearance, etc., to bring back or put back in a former place or position, reinstate (Webster Comprehensive Dictionary, 1992).

To involve means to include, and to have a component part, or to play a role and become part of (Webster Comprehensive Dictionary, 1992).

By the concept "support groups" is meant an organized group of people or a committee empowered to offer assistance and support to uphold others and keep them from failing or declining (Webster Comprehensive Dictionary, 1992) In this study the concept refers to a selected group of people trained by the church leadership specifically to offer support to single mothers, encourage them to maintain self confidence and dignity to continue facing life and rendering services in the church in spite of their marital status.

This group is trained to restore, encourage and involve single mothers to get fully engaged in the entire church program by participating in different church structures such as mothers' gatherings, prayer meetings, empowering workshops and intercession meetings.

A population is a collection of objects, events or individuals having some common characteristics that the researcher is interested in studying (Mouton, 1998: 34). The population singled out by the researcher is not the same as the everyday understanding of the general population in the country.

Data analysis and interpretation in qualitative research is primarily an inductive process of organizing the data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among the categories. Qualitative analysis is therefore a systematic process of selecting, categorizing, comparing, synthesizing and interpreting data to provide explanations of the single phenomenon of interest (White, C.J., 2005).

The above definitions were chosen because according to the researcher they define the variables very clearly, and this will help readers to understand the study easily. The research investigates if there are some strategies that The Full Gospel Church Of God in district three in the Limpopo Province among the black communities, implement to restore and involve black single mothers in the whole church program.

F.G.C stands for The Full Gospel Church Of God.

S A stands for South Africa

U.S.A stands for The United States of America.

OT stands for Old Testament

NT stands for New Testament

### **3.4 What informs the research?**

The research is informed by the theory that the above-mentioned denomination in the black community is struggling trying to restore and accommodate single mothers in its program because the majority of the members seem to have some negative attitudes towards single mothers. There is a large number of single mothers in the black community local churches which exists, and this presents a serious challenge to pastors in particular and to the church leadership in general.

The literature review also enhanced the researcher's curiosity and understanding that such a challenge, namely restoring and accommodating single mothers in the entire church program really does exist.

### **3.5 The validity and reality of the study**

To investigate the validity and the reality of the study, the researcher has interacted with the church population in the black community in district three of the Full Gospel Church Of God in the Limpopo Province. The population covers local churches under district three, which is located in the Vhembe Area, in the Limpopo Province. The research was conducted around the sampled local churches in Malamulele, Thohoyandou and Musina.

### **3.6 Sampling**

The sampling was done as follows:

- One local church based at Malamulele town.
- Two local churches based at Musina.
- Three local churches around Malamulele area, in the rural areas.
- Three local churches in Venda (Makwarela and Thohoyandou).

### **3.7 Conferences and workshops**

A conference was arranged with local churches, around these areas. Single mothers' conference was arranged in groups of empowerment workshops and group discussion.

During these sessions the researcher had delegated some church elders to help him collect data in response to single mothers' treatment in the church. The researcher first discussed questions with these delegated groups making them familiar with his research question and the questions for interview. In most cases the researcher could sense some tensions from both pastors and single mothers. It seemed like some of them were suspicious. After having explained his case clearly, the researcher managed to convince them that he didn't have any hidden agenda at all.

The researcher has decided to make this sampling because it is easy and convenient (both financially and time wise) to gain access to these churches. The researcher has been working with these congregations for more than twenty years. Some of the ministers who are pastors in these congregations worked with him in the district. And he has been frequently invited as a speaker in different occasions, e.g. general conferences, district conferences, Easter conferences and crusades.

Some of the local pastors in these congregations graduated at the Bible College where the researcher was a facilitator. Also, these local churches are not very far from each other. They also share the common culture, and thus have the same understanding concerning single mothers in the church.

All the ministers, the church leadership and the congregations at large reveal that the local churches are not doing enough to respond to the needs of single mothers. Some pastors even confessed that they were ashamed of themselves why they didn't notice this need before.

But they all agree that these needs must be addressed and that a different approach (not traditional) should be followed. Traditionally single mothers are neglected and they are even marginalized because many people believe that they have contributed themselves to their singleness.

The researcher believes that his participants also will benefit from the project because their eyes will be opened and they will develop means whereby the issue of single mothers will be resolved, and this will consequently improve the image of the church.

This project will impact both married and unmarried people together with pastors and the church leadership of the Full Gospel Church Of God in South Africa.

The instrument is designed to encourage single mothers to express their view, pain, anger and frustrations. The participants will be challenged by the question of acceptance of single mothers, affirming them as people who do not deserve to be condemned or to be rejected by their brethren in the Lord. The church as a whole also will be encouraged to love, accept and care for this disadvantaged folk.

Several empowering workshops were conducted at the above-sampled congregations where participants were privileged to listen to one another, have opportunities both to ask and answer questions, to listen to stories from single mothers sharing experiences and also listen to the invited speaker who is well acquainted with grieves from single mothers.

The researcher believes that there will be a paradigm shift in the church from the status quo, which will revolutionize the Full Gospel Church Of God in South Africa to develop a caring ministry to single mothers in the church. This revolution will also help the church deal with the denial concerning the need for this specific ministry

### **3.8 Interviews**

Interviews were conducted with pastors, church elders, single mothers and married couples as well as the youth leadership. Unstructured questions were used in interviewing the church and the outcome duly recorded. In certain cases tape recorders and video tapes were used to capture the information. Speeches, discussions and workshops as well as conferences were conducted, and the findings were recorded.

The researcher interviewed single mothers at certain occasions and the response was duly recorded.

The researcher devoted seven months to do field work.

3.8.1 The following is the table of the interview schedule:

DATE	PLACE	TIME	TYPE	CONDUCTED BY
03.07.09	KARIBU LODGE	14H00	WORKSHOP	PASTOR I.M
22.08.09	MUSINA	10H00	WORKSHOP	PASOR S
17.09.09	MALAMULELE	14H00	WORKSHOP	PASTOR K
24.09.09	NANDONI DAM	11H00	SINGLE MOTHERS' CONFERENCE	PASTOR M
24.10.09	MAKWARELA	10H00	DISTRICT CONFERENCE	PASTOR J
21.11.09	PATMOS R C	11H00	LOCAL CHURCH COUNCIL	PASTOR HD
28.11.09	MAKULEKE	10H00	WORKSHOP	PASTOR G
31.12.09	NANDONI DAM	11H00	WORKSHOP	PASTOR W
23.01.10	PLANGE	14H00	WORKSHOP	PASTOR MS



### **3.9 Pastors' challenges concerning single mothers**

One interviewee points out, that pastors are faced with serious challenges concerning the treatment of single mothers. She indicates that single mothers are usually isolated (not included) from the church program. She says that they are being undermined by their fellow members because of their marital status (Extracted from the report presented at Karibu annual conference for pastors and their spouses, July 2009).

Another single woman also confirms that pastors in deed have serious problems in trying to solve single mothers' family problems. She points out that pastors are being suspected that they fall into traps of having unhealthy relationships with single mothers while trying to help them through counseling. She further indicates that pastors' wives are highly suspicious of single mothers accusing them of having affairs with their husbands (pastors)

Responding to these allegations pastor S indicated that these accusations are really there, and in some cases they are valid. He gave several examples where pastors were trapped by single mothers into immorality. He went on, "these fallen pastors eventually confessed that initially they had no intention of falling in love with these women. They lost control while counseling with them.

This challenge is very critical and proves that there is a lot of mistrust between pastors and their wives and as such it affects the progress of the church.

Kennedy, D.J, (1996) asserts that "we live in a country in which one out of every three children is born out of wedlock, one out of every two marriages ends up in divorce."

In another interview session held at Nandoni Dam between Malamulele and Thohoyandou on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September, 2009 Pastor S said: "Most of the pastors have a negative attitude towards the morality of single mothers. Single mothers are usually

blamed that they cannot afford to live a holy life.” He also mentioned that pastors’ wives do not want to see single mothers close to their husbands because they are afraid that they may take their husbands from them.

### **3.10 Personal experiences shared**

A certain minister tells his own experience. He says that he was one day unceremoniously confronted by his own wife when this day he had visited a certain young widow, responding to an urgent call; to go and help her sorting out some domestic issues. No sooner had he arrived there than he received a phone call that he was wanted very urgently at home. When he informed his wife that he was still committed helping this woman, his wife indicated that she was not pleased by his being in this woman’s house. When he reached home his wife was already in her fits of rage. She insisted that there must be something else between her husband and this woman. She ended up phoning this widow telling her that she must leave her husband alone. This pastor told that he was very embarrassed by this.

To confirm the above story another single mother reports: “Pastors have a challenge dealing with single mothers because they are unable to help single mothers solve their family problems.” She says this is because pastors are slandered, accused and blamed that they fall in love with single mothers during counseling. She goes on to say that “pastors’ wives contribute a lot to these problems because they don’t trust their husbands. The same interviewee asserts that single mothers are not granted opportunities to participate fully in the church program because they are being undermined. This is due to the fact that most church doctrines are against one parent family set up. When it comes to leadership and other key positions in the church, she says there’ no way a single mother is allowed to occupy. She complained: “One has to be married in order to be fully recognized and accepted in this church.”

She went on to indicate that for one to be recognized as a respectful member of the church, one has to have a husband as a covering. ”Most church folks object to single mothers occupying leadership positions,” she complained. “They say that it will set a

bad example in the church,” she concluded. This single mother speaking from personal experience explains that “elder church members still have a problem of being led by single mothers because they think that single mothers are susceptible to fornication and adultery.” On concluding her remarks this woman was now highly emotional. She was even weeping. This roused other single mothers’ emotions too. Wiping her tears away, this single woman quoted from Exodus 22:22-24.

This scripture says: “Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless.”

The atmosphere had become tense as another single mother, looking older than, the former stood up and responded. “I appeal to the church and pastors in particular to earnestly educate their congregations to respect other people’ feeling, and sympathize with them.” She added, “I believe it is God’s purpose to see all church members, including single mothers happy and free in the church.” She urged pastors to organize seminars and workshops and invite all members to teach them that we are all equal before God, and that we all deserve his grace. She emphasized that this will enable people to realize that every person was created for a purpose.

What was exciting in this work shop was attendance and participation. Notices and invitations for this conference had been given 14 days prior to the gathering. The response was exceptionally good. This could be partly because of the venue itself. Nandoni Dam is very attractive to tourists. Another reason for the expected response may be due to the nature of the conference itself. One single mother said it was an honor to be invited to the single mothers’ conference. She indicated that it was for the first time for her to hear of such a conference. During interviews and discussion sessions the participants were actively involved. Some were asking questions, while others were answering them. They also shared experiences among themselves. 55 single mothers attended this workshop. Other participants were pastors and some other church members.

Pastor S concluded the session by assuring single mothers that their plea will be seriously considered. He highlighted his understanding of some other issues to be addressed as well.

He said: "The church should do better than just accommodate single mothers. Some basic needs challenging these people need to be addressed as well. For instance donations, bursaries, support groups and projects to assist single mothers raising their fatherless children should be put into place. " It was unanimously agreed, that orchards and gardening projects should be started to produce fresh fruit and vegetables to feed the poor in the church. It was also suggested that drama, art and other cultural activities should be promoted to encourage children from single parent families to participate and build and develop their skills and talents.

Sister K was offered a privilege to pass a vote of thanks. She expressed that she was very grateful because of this meeting. She further indicated that if single mothers can be given the opportunity to participate in the full church program and projects, they can make a tremendous progress. " According to my knowledge," She said, "Single mothers pay their monthly tithes and give their free will offering cheerfully."

In conclusion this single mother expressed her anger and frustration, more-specially during occasions such as 'fathers' days'. Hear her vent her anger: "Married mothers undermine us very badly. They ignore our feelings. During fathers' days you will hear them saying: "Let's run the program fast and go and enjoy cakes and handing presents to our husbands. Single mothers, you will bear with us..." This renders single mothers feel unwanted and inferior."She concludes.

This was one of the longest sessions the researcher has witnessed in his research because it took one and half hours. But because the response was very good and fruitful, the length of the workshop did not bother anybody. 55 single mothers attended the workshop.

Sister G closed the session with a prayer. A finger lunch was served, and the researcher was delighted to hear some of the single mothers expressing their appreciation of the workshop and its out comes.

This reminds me of someone who once said: “Some churches are now getting matured. At least they regard all church members as equals. But others don’t. They use their worldly status to crush the souls of the under privileged in the church.”

This tells us that the challenges of single mothers in the church are world wide issues that demand wisdom to deal with.

### **3.11 An empowerment workshop at Musina**

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> august 2009 at 10 h00, an empowerment workshop was held at one of the Full Gospel Church Of God (congregations) local churches at Musina. Notices for the meeting were sent out 14 days prior to the gathering. The response was good. 35 single mothers attended. Five pastors from the district were also invited and they all attended.

Before the morning service started, tea was served. The weather was favorable. Musina is generally very hot, but this day was cool after the rain. The organizer had invited a famous music artist. What a wonderful singer she is! The interviewer had organized one of the famous gospel music artists to minister to the gathering with music. Sister N is a wonderful singer. She started operating her CD player and every member of the congregation enjoyed the occasion.

Pastor J opened the session in prayer. Then pastor M, the program director unfolded the purpose of the day. In his introduction remarks he said: “There is no institution that can be compared to the church. In fact the church is a family and a home for the saints. You are very fortunate today to form the part of this important gathering. This is the kind of workshops that should be held in every local church. I want to assure you that the Full Gospel Church Of God is under going a paradigm shift. By the grace of God we are going to try our best to let everybody feel loved and accepted in the house of God. I encourage you single mothers, to enjoy this meeting and to participate fully and freely. God bless you.” The congregation shouted with joy and then sister N rendered another song.

Pastor S opened the session officially, and read from 1 John 3: 11-12.

“11This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.  
12Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil and murdered his brother...”

The pastor indicated that nothing should replace brotherly kindness in the church. He pointed out that as far as God is concerned we are all His lovely children irrespective of gender, color or marital status. Again he highlighted that Jesus is the first one on earth to treat all human beings as equals. Jesus taught all people to respect and love one another. In his key note address, pastor S encouraged single mothers to be more confident, bold and work hard; since to God they are as important as anyone else. He concluded by saying that: "In heaven gender issues or marital status won't count." His sermon was short, concise and to the point. It took only twenty minutes.

Open discussions session was initiated by pastor C who was delegated by the researcher to interview single mothers by asking series of questions from the researcher. The researcher himself was observing and taking notes down.

>Are single mothers involved in the full church program?

Answer: "No," answered sister N. "The church is not sure of their every day moral life. So the leadership is afraid of involving single mothers in the church activities, except in cases where there's evidence for good morality on the part of a single mother.

Sister K responded: "The involvement of single mothers in the full church program differs from local church to another. Some pastors and their congregations don't have any problem involving single mothers in the church program. Of course they are also careful not to give latitude to everyone of them. The majority of local churches have problems with regard to involving single mothers in the church program. They are very suspicious of them. They suspect that single mothers may be having some unhealthy relationships."

"Single mothers are partially involved in the church program, but they are used in different church structures. When they are not permitted to play a role in most cases is when they have to preach to the entire prayer meetings. But in home cells and other prayer meetings they participate, although one may sense that there are some congregation members who don't feel comfortable," answered sister Q.

Pastor H answered: "Yes. They are or should be involved because every individual has his or her gifts that should be manifested in the church. As far as I'm concerned there are no 'little people' in the body of Christ." He ended by quoting 1Ch 12:18-22.

“But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.”

According to the researcher, even though pastor H answered with an unequivocal yes, his explanation is indicative of the fact that there’s in deed problems in the church regarding the involvement of single mothers in the whole church program. H said “as far as I’m concerned,” and “there are no little people in the body of Christ.” These statements reveal that there’s something that he knows that’s not going well for single mothers in the church.

>Should single mothers take (occupy) leadership positions in the church?

Answer: “No,” answered sister D. “Because other church doctrines do not allow incomplete family members to be in leadership positions. One has to be married in order to be a good leader, because one has to lead by example.”

“Yes,” sister N interjected, “depending on the maturity of the church and the quality of leadership detected on that single mother. Many single mothers have outstanding leadership qualities. We must remember that some of these single mothers were already playing key roles in the church before they lost their spouses.”

“A born again believer, filled with the Holy Spirit, and submitting to the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ; and following the leading of the Holy Spirit; qualifies to take a leadership position she aspires, more-especially if the church has confidence in her.”

Looking critically to this answer one may again detect a problem. Consider for instance the concluding remark: “...if the church has confidence in her.”

The session ended, and the researcher was privileged to interview pastors alone.

Question: What are the challenges facing pastors with regard to restoring and accommodating single mothers in the full church program?

Answers: “Pastors are facing the following challenges regarding single mothers in the church:

- Single mothers are usually isolated (not included) in the church program.
- They are undermined by fellow mothers because of their marital status.
- Pastors have a problem because they are blamed and suspected in most cases that they tend to fall in love with single mothers.
- Pastors' wives are also the major cause of problems in the church because they don't trust their husbands."

Another answer: The challenges facing pastors are:

- Pastors are not certain regarding single mothers' morality. So they are afraid of involving them in the church program.
- Some pastors have got negative attitudes towards the morality of single mothers.
- Single mothers are generally condemned that they are unholy.
- Pastors' wives are suspicious when they see their husbands frequently going to single mothers' homes.
- Most of the single mothers don't live right. They maintain unhealthy relationships and so break many families. So it becomes very difficult for the pastor to use them in the church.

The meeting ended with some casual discussions on the issue of single mothers in the church. One minister said that even though pastors and the church ought to be sympathetic with single mothers, they should also be very careful. This caution will help to prevent unnecessary problems. Many young pastors have been trapped into fornication and adultery while trying to help single mothers. A finger lunch was served at 14h00, and pastor S closed the workshop with a prayer. This workshop lasted for one hour and fifteen minutes. The researcher observed that prior to the first session there was a bit of tension. It seems like both the pastors and single mothers were anxious. But after pastor J has made the introductory remarks, the tension was broken.



### **3.12 The district conference at Makwarela**

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of October 2009, the researcher was privileged to attend the district conference at Makwarela in Thohoyandou. The conference started at 10 o'clock. Notices for the conference had been sent out fourteen days prior to the meeting.

During the first session pastor H.D addressed the assembly and highlighted the importance of fellowship in the church. He read from Psalm 133.

The scripture reads as follows: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron' beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore."

The pastor indicated that both vertical (from the top down) and horizontal fellowship is essential. The church needs to maintain warm relationships and have fellowship and communion with God and with one another. He indicated that even in the world unfair discrimination is severely discouraged. He encouraged the church to love, forgive, accept and tolerate one another. By this time the atmosphere for praise and worship was set. The congregation was so excited and began to worship God in harmony, and the spirit of brotherly kindness prevailed.

Then the pastor read again from 1 John 4: 7: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God."

By the end of this short sermon that took twenty minutes only, almost all the congregation members were in tears.

Then the announcements were made. The second session would break into several categories which include workshops and group discussions.

In one of the groups sister K (a young widow) indicated how difficult it is for a single mother to cope well in the local church. She mentioned that most church members are not properly taught. She said that most church folks are biased against single mothers to an extent that they accuse them of immorality, sometimes without facts or evidence. She ended by saying: "The pastor needs not be judgmental, but rather be sympathetic

and accommodative towards single mothers. The pastor has to educate his congregation to be able to value all people just like God values them. God is not a respecter of persons, but He values those who submit to His will. So the pastor must be exemplary in showing love to all people and never segregate people because of their marital status.”

“The church”, she concluded, “is called to encourage sexual discipline outside and inside marriage. The church is also called upon to promote a new culture for the glory of God, by loving, accepting and affirming one another in spite of marital status”.

This reminds me of one teacher who boldly exclaimed while encouraging single mothers, “This does not mean that Christians cannot say that it would have been preferable had this young woman not shared herself intimately with a boy who hardly knew how to appreciate the intricate beauty of her body and the vulnerability of her love (Laura, 2006).”

The same author continues: “Christians are surely called to teach girls and young women that their bodies are not primarily in waiting “for sex with a man, but rather actively in service today for the work of the Holy Spirit.”

After the session was closed, some refreshments were served. Single mothers were overheard to appreciate the meeting. They pointed out that meetings of this kind are essential and need to be held regularly.

### **3.13 Elections at Patmos Revelation Centre**

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of November 2009, we were conducting elections for the church council at Patmos Revelation Centre. During the election progress the researcher sensed some tensions ensuing. He knows young ladies with potential in this local church, and was holding a thumb for some of them to be elected. Unfortunately the congregation saw it differently. As the elections continued, he was disappointed to see none of these women nominated. The votes went to some mothers whose advantage was a mere marital status. He didn't know how he could intervene.

Finally, sister C was nominated for the treasurer. The pastor heaved a sigh of relief. He granted the congregation the privilege to second the nomination. There was a

hesitation. The pastor quickly understood what was going on. She is a single mother and therefore her nomination presents a problem. But sister C is a woman of great influence in the church. She is a reliable and responsible young lady. Though a widow, she has proved herself to be faithful and loyal. The whole community and the church respected this young lady. But because of stereotyping and bias it was not easy to get her elected in the church. The fear of violating the status quo in the church is very serious.

Eventually brother S raised his hand, and exclaimed, "I second the nomination." There was a slight murmur, but it had no impact. Because one man dared to violate the order, the majority of people indicated that they were in favor of the nomination. So sister C was elected the treasurer of Patmos Revelation Centre. The pastor (sweating a little bit) looked over the congregation with assurance. Then the pastor realized that he is faced with a great task to deal with this frame of reference in the church.

### **3.14 Interviews held at Musina Full Gospel Church Of God**

The same experience happened at one of the congregations around Musina. The researcher had sought for an opportunity to observe the local church council elections. His first observation is that the male factor was dominating. Both the deputy chair person and the secretary treasurer happened to be males. Although the two additional members were females, it took time to reach consensus because one of them was a single mother. A hot argument issued because most of the congregation members had voted for her, but some few die-hards and conservatives opposed it. The pastor finally managed to take control of the situation and calmed them down. He then spoke to the researcher telling him that it was long since the church had this struggle. He pointed out that what rendered the situation worse was that some of the single mothers of course cannot be trusted. He said: "Most single mothers are not faithful. Some may still want to have some unhealthy relationships. This makes it very difficult for the pastor to vindicate them. Unfortunately most single mothers, who lack self control, end up wasting their lives in a miserable manner.

In one of the sampled local churches around Malamulele the researcher interviewed pastor M. This pastor indicates that there is a serious challenge facing pastors in

particular and the church leadership in general, concerning the treatment of single mothers in the local church. “Among other things,” the pastor said, “there is indeed a serious problem while dealing with single mothers in the local church. For instance, one is not sure as to how they can be classified accurately within the church structure. One doesn’t know whether to classify them amongst the youth or mothers. The situation becomes worse if they are teenage mothers.

It is practically problematic to establish their own group as single mothers since it may even sound offensive to the elderly single mothers that were initially married.”

“Further more,” he continued. “They may even feel marginalized or discriminated against if they be separated from married mothers, who in turn don’t become comfortable if they be grouped together with single mothers. Also, one finds it a challenge to find a term that will address them without rousing suspicion. Because the term ‘single mother,’ may bring to some an understanding that they have children outside the wedlock, or even trigger some bitterness on the part of those who have been divorced or lost their husbands; an alternate concept could address them better. Perhaps the term single parent could be more polite.”

“Finally,” pastor M said, “in my opinion single mothers should be accommodated and included in the full church program. They should not be discriminated against on the basis of their marital status. According to section 9 of the constitution of South Africa, no one should be discriminated against on the ground of marital status. They should be involved in the whole church program like the rest of church members.” Explaining further on the role of single mothers in leadership positions, pastor M says: “Single mothers should be given opportunities to serve in key (leadership) positions provided they meet the requirements (biblical standards) for leadership.” So he agrees that single mothers also can occupy leadership positions in the local church so that they can exercise the gifts and they should be encouraged to maximize their potential serving the Lord. He concluded: “After all single mothers form the majority of mothers in most congregations.”

### **3.15 An empowerment workshop at Makuleke**

On the 21<sup>st</sup> November, 2009 at 10h00 an empowering workshop was held at one of the Full Gospel Church Of God congregations around Malamulele area at Makuleke village. Invitations had been made and notices for the meeting were sent out 14 days prior to the day of the gathering. The response was good. 35 single mothers attended and their age ranged from twenty-five to forty-eight. And five pastors from the district were also invited and they all turned up. Prior to the meeting one pastor was a bit anxious and curious. He kept on saying: “Do you think that this meeting will be of any help? Nobody really has any solution to the problem of single mothers in the church.”

Before the morning service started, tea was served. The weather was favorable. Makuleke is generally very hot, but this day was cool after the rain. The organizer had also invited a famous music artist called sister N. She is such a wonderful singer. She started operating her CD player and every member was charged with much excitement.

Pastor J opened the workshop with a prayer. Then pastor T, the program director unfolded the purpose of the gathering. In his introduction remarks he said: “There is no institution that can be compared to the church. In fact the church is a wonderful family and a home for the saints. You are very fortunate today to form the part of this exceptional meeting. These are the kind of workshops that should be held regularly in every local church. I want to assure you that the Full Gospel Church Of God is undergoing a paradigm shift. By the grace of God we are going to try our best to let everybody feel loved and accepted in the house of God. I encourage you mothers to enjoy this meeting and to participate fully. God bless you.” There was an applause and then sister N ascended the stage and rendered an item.

Pastor S opened the meeting officially by reading from 1Cor. 13: 1-13.

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames ...”

The pastor indicated that nothing should replace brotherly kindness and love in the church. He pointed out that as far as God is concerned, we are all equal before Him and he loves us all, irrespective of gender or marital status. Again he highlighted that Jesus is the first one on earth to treat all human beings equally and to teach all people to respect and love one another. In his key note address pastor S encouraged single mothers to be more confident, bold and work hard since they are as important to God as anyone else. He concluded by saying: "In heaven gender issue and marriage won't count."

Open discussion session followed and Pastor C was delegated by the researcher to interview single mothers by asking them, series of questions as presented below. The researcher himself was observing. He was also recording the proceedings.

< Are single mothers involved in the full church program?

"No," answered sister N. "The church is not sure of their every day moral life. So the leadership is afraid of involving them in the church activities, except in cases where there's evidence for good morality."

Sister K responded: "The involvement of single mothers in the full church program differs. Some pastors and their congregations don't have any problem involving single mothers in the church activities. Of course they are also careful not to give latitude to everyone of them without close observation. The church is very suspicious of single mothers. The leadership suspects that single mothers may be having some unhealthy relationships."

"Single mothers are partially involved in the church program, but they are used in different church structures. Where they are not permitted to play a role in most cases is when they have to preach to the entire congregation. But in home cells and other prayer meetings they participate although one may sense that they are some congregation members who don't become comfortable in these cases," answered sister Q.

Pastor H answered, "Yes. They are or should be involved because every individual has his or gifts that should be manifested in the church. As far as I'm concerned there are no 'little people' in the body of Christ." He concluded by quoting 1 Cor. 12: 18-23.

“But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts, of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special modesty.”

According to the researcher, even though pastor H answered with unequivocal yes, his explanation is indicative of the fact that there’s in deed problems in the church regarding the involvement of single mothers in the whole church program. He said, “as far as I’m concerned,” and “there are no little people in the body of Christ.” These statements reveal that there’s something that he knows as challenges concerning single mothers in the church.

Question: Should single mothers take (occupy) leadership positions in the church?

Answers: “No,” answered sister H. “because other church doctrines do not allow incomplete family members to be in leadership positions. One has to be married in order to be a good leader because one has to lead by example.”

“Yes,” sister D interjected, “depending on the maturity of the congregation, and the quality of leadership detected on the single mother. Many single mothers have outstanding leadership abilities and qualities. We must remember that some of these single mothers were already playing key roles in the church before they lost their husbands.”

“Any born again believer, filled with the Holy Spirit, and submitting to the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, and following the leading of the Spirit; and if such a single mother is principled; then she qualifies to take a leadership position that she aspires As long as the local church has confidence in her, a single mother can occupy a leadership position.

The session ended and the researcher had time to interview the pastors alone.

Question: What are the challenges facing pastors with regard to accommodating single mothers in the full church program?

Answers: "Pastors are facing the following challenges regarding single mothers:

Single mothers are usually isolated (not included) from the church program.

They are undermined by fellow mothers because of their marital status.

Pastors have a problem because they are unable to help these mothers solve their family problems because they are blamed and suspected in most cases that they tend to fall in love with single mothers.

Pastors' wives are also the major cause of problems in the church because they don't trust their husbands.

Pastors are not certain regarding single mothers' morality. So they are afraid of involving them in the church program.

Single mothers are generally condemned that they are unholy.

Some pastors have got negative attitudes towards the morality of single mothers.

Pastors' wives are suspicious of single mothers when they see their husbands frequenting to single mothers' homes.

Most of the single mothers don't live right. Most of them get involved in unhealthy relationship and destroy others' families. So it becomes very difficult for pastors to use them freely in the local church.

The meeting ended with some casual discussions on the issue of single mothers in the church. One minister said that even though pastors and the church ought to be sympathetic with single mothers, pastors should be very careful because many young pastors have been trapped into adultery while trying to help single mothers.

A finger lunch was served at 14h00 and the workshop was closed with prayer by pastor S.

### **3.16 Single mothers' retreat held at Nandoni Dam**

On the 31st December, 2009 I attended the single mothers' retreat that was held at Nandoni Dam (between Malamulele and Thohoyandou). This conference was arranged by sister M from Mudabula, one of the villages in Malamulele. This conference was



attended by single mothers from different local churches of the Full Gospel Church Of God. As arranged between the conference organizer and the researcher, an observation schedule was implemented.

The researcher first observed what was going on. Among other things the researcher observed that the leader (of the single mothers) and the organizer of this convention was a single mother herself. There were 55 attendants. Sister M is a widow who has lost her husband very recently. The majority of the single mothers were between twenty and forty-five of age.

On the words of welcome and the purpose of the meeting, sister M shared her experiences with other single mothers. She highlighted how difficult it is for a young lady to suddenly lose her husband. She indicated that the loss is so terrific that one feels like is lost. She also pointed out how people began to treat her very strangely. Some of them even though they were trying to console her, their words and attitudes were confusing. She said: "Even those who were very close to me, the ones I hoped they would offer sound comfort, confused me the most." She continued, "I felt like half of myself, was torn off my body."

"When the church members arrived," she went on, "I thought that the night mare would ebb away. But I was terribly mistaken. In stead the situation became worse because it was like the pastor himself was even scared to come and talk with me. The pastor's wife tried her best to help, though she did it with mixed feelings. I tried to read her mind but it was very difficult to reconcile her attitude with her corny words. She was like those who would like to help you but at the same time they are suspicious of you. I remember her saying, "Mrs M, take courage. You are not the first one to experience this kind of loss." She began to narrate a list of those who have lost their husbands and unfortunately what they did there after. She went on to indicate those things that many single mothers did to betray their status as good mothers in the church. Then followed what I always dreaded since my husband's death. She started pouring in her lectures of morality, partly assuring and partly threatening. My dear sisters, it was tough. Then I realized that I had begun a very strange and lonely journey of life."

Sister M's talk evoked different responses from her listeners. Some were quiet, others mumbled something silently. But as she concluded by indicating how courageous she was facing this ordeal, and how she stood her ground not to be intimidated by this situation, the tone of the gathering changed. Some of them began to cheer up, while others laughed, and others wept.

Then there was a slot for single mothers to share their personal experiences. One single mother stood up and with a gesture of her hand she calmed down the congregation from shouting. And she began, "My dear sisters in the Lord, or shall I say my dear yoke fellows?" This is the day to remember. Why? Because gathered as we are, being single mothers, it makes life worth living to realize that one is not alone in this dark journey of life. There are things that happen in life which are beyond one's control.

"The irony of life is that one doesn't know what tomorrow will bring. I remember my wedding day. Oh, what a glorious day? But one day all things suddenly began to change. How many of you have ever been in a situation where you wished what you were going through was a mere dream, and that you would finally wake up and they told you that it never happened? That's what I have experienced myself."

My experience dear sisters taught me that it is not necessarily what happens to us that really matters. But what really matters is how we respond to what happens to us.

For instance it is what follows after we have lost our beloved ones that affect us badly. Single mothers are not treated as other Christians. They are marginalized by the rest of the church. Some married women suspect and hate us. They have got some fears that we will break their homes. That's why we suffer rejection and unnecessary humiliation.

"I remember only six months after the death of my dear husband that I received a call at mid-night. A cold voice from the distance sounded at the other end, and this woman said: "Sister K, you will bear with me if I hurt you." You can imagine how I began to feel, more-specially if you know whose voice it was. This woman continued, "There's a lot of talk in this village concerning you and my husband. People are talking. They say that pastor S, who frequently comes to your house, has started an unhealthy relationship with you. " Her voice was partly alerting and partly suspicious. Then I answered: "Thank you very much sister for alerting me. But perhaps it will help you to understand that at

this stage I have more important things to consider than the community rumor. With these words I switched off my cell phone. How ridiculous this is!”

By this time the other single mothers were shouting and clasping their hands. One could understand that these mothers really need meetings like these, where they can share their bitter experiences. It also helps them manage their stress.

The guest speaker was then introduced. This pastor proved himself to have gathered adequate information from different sources and settings about single mothers and their fate. In his motivational talk he managed to embrace both categories of single motherhood as envisaged by the researcher. Another thing that was noteworthy is that of the different groups of single mothers, there exists a challenge that needs to be addressed with caution.

From the researcher’ observation, it was discovered that those single mothers who never got married at all, are regarded unfit to claim proper motherhood. The divorcees and widows on the other hand, are accorded a little respect.

What is hurting is that the latter scorn at the former. Single mothers who got babies out side the wed lock are accused of having illegitimate children, and thus are labeled fornicators and adulterers.

Further than that, the divorcees and widows complain that single mothers who never married are the ones who cause a lot of trouble amongst single mothers in the church. Even when they are busy sharing experiences one can easily detect that single mothers who got babies out side the wed lock have very less to share. The pastor who was preaching tried his best to reconcile these issues. Among other things he indicated that as far as God is concerned, we are all equal before Him. Then he began to read from 1 Jhn 2: 8-11.

“Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.”

The congregation listened attentively. Pastor P was requested to pray for the word.

Then he continued, "I'm speaking before you this morning, representing my fellow shepherds, called by the Lord Jesus Christ to take care of His flock. However, I regret to agree with many of the mothers, who shared their nasty experiences; that the church is not doing enough to respond to the needs of single mothers. I for one believe that the day has dawned for the church to open her eyes, move from the status quo and spread the gospel that all human beings are equal before God. I am here to assure you that God Almighty loves and accepts us all regardless of our marital status. It is my prayer that this new move will reach all local churches and we will all embrace the love of God and begin to show the world that we belong to one another. We must promote this kingdom principle." The speaker went on to encourage and assure single mothers that the church is in deed shifting from the status quo. There is a paradigm shift in the church. This revolution is essential to accommodate all church members and involve them in the whole church program." Pastors are now struggling with the question of accepting single mothers as lovely members of the body of Christ. The pastor indicated that even if some of the allegations against single mothers may be justified, rejecting them is not the solution. He pointed out that most of those single mothers who are not faithful do not always choose to be like that. But some of them are driven to do so because of frustration and lack of proper support.

"If the church can become matured enough and accept these mothers, form support groups and restore and involve them in the church program; most of them can become wonderful assets in the church." This was followed by a great applause.

Two sessions were held in this convention. In the second session, single mothers were helped and the minister prayed for them. The atmosphere was charged with the mighty power of God. Some of the mothers were praying, shouting with joy, and others were weeping. The end of the session was scheduled for testimonies.

One single mother stood up and said: "I thank the Lord for this meeting. I also thank God for His wonderful servant who was raised for the time such as this. God bless you, servant of God. My personal testimony is: I almost left the church because of the loneliness and the pain I suffered after the loss of my husband. It was unbearable. One

cannot explain the sting brought by the loss of someone you dearly love; more-specially if it happens dramatically and tragically. I really felt like half of myself, was gone with him. People came and tried to calm me down, but it sounded like a dream. Both my friends, relatives and some church members tried to comfort me, but I couldn't understand or accept their condolences. These people would interject something that made me feel like I would be hopeless and helpless for ever. They would say something like this: "Dear sister, we understand your situation. But please, don't let the situation drive you into breaking other women' families."

"Well, the advice sounds fine, but the timing was very bad. Why the rush? Why didn't they leave me alone? I need enough time to recover before they can bombard me with their bright ideas. Yes. The timing was completely wrong."

This lady went on to say: "I don't understand why after so many centuries the church is still struggling to accommodate single mothers. When my husband was still alive, we held a remarkable position in the church. But suddenly after his death, the church behaves like they don't even know me. I have become a total stranger in my own spiritual home."

She added: "It seems like the guarantee for genuine church membership, in the Full Gospel Church is a marital status. How ridiculous. May the Lord open our eyes and make us understand the role we must play in the church."

Listening to this mother's testimony makes one to wonder why the church would continue neglecting single mothers. One can sense the bitterness that this mother has. You can also figure out how many single mothers she represents, who are in a similar predicament.

After the meeting this single mother seemed to be relieved. She said that the sermon had helped her very much. She also indicated that it was long that she was fighting this bitterness, pain and the sense of rejection. One then wonders how many single mothers this woman represents, who are hurting in the church.

Then sister P stood up. She testified how thrilled she felt after the meeting. She added: "My dear sisters, it is really a tremendous relief to learn that the church at last cares. Who would think that stigmatized, marginalized and rejected folks such as us would be

so highly esteemed that the church would organize such a wonderful convention such as this? One day I almost collapsed in the public market when sister K showed me a magazine with four pictures. In these pictures were four girls, one a Latin American wearing a T shirt labeled "CHEAP", The second one was a black American, labeled "REJECT", the third one was an Asian girl labeled "DIRTY", and the fourth a white young woman labeled "NOBODY". As my friend and I continued reading this article, we were shocked by the provoking statement that suggested that single mothers are labeled to be cheap, dirty, and that they are rejected as a bunch of nameless 'nobodies'."

"If these attitudes were displayed by people outside only, it wouldn't matter much. But unfortunately these stereotyping happens in the church also. All this is done in the name of holiness. This testimony stirred up emotions on the part of other single mothers. One could see them, wiping tears away from their eyes. But when sister G stood up, the atmosphere quickly changed. She started with the song: "Everything is going to be alright." What a singer she is!

"My beloved sisters," she commenced. "I am one of those mothers who have suffered the same fate as witnessed by our dear sisters here. Perhaps your image is not as tarnished as some of us who got babies out of wedlock. Some of you have only been unfortunate losing your husbands, and more-so at the early age. Of course your experience is very painful. But imagine those of us who have just been abused, deceived and seduced into having unwanted babies. These heartless men trapped us into having unexpected babies whom they don't even care to support. They have even disappeared into the unknown world, leaving us with fatherless children. They have in deed rendered us cheap, dirty and rejected bunch of nameless nobodies.

"Now, our consolation ought to come from our families and the church, but on the contrary, these are the institutions that vehemently reject us. But we thank God for what He is doing in these last days. We hope that sooner or later the church as a whole will unanimously accept, love, forgive and restore us and warmly involve us in the whole church program. We are so eager to serve the Lord freely and receive His grace that will enable us to forgive those men who abused us. And we believe that one day they

may repent and begin to claim their fatherless children.” She concluded by encouraging other single mothers not to lose hope. She indicated that it is the duty of the church to bring into the society a new culture of hope, in the hopeless world. The other women began to cheer up, and that slot for testimonies was closed. The session was closed with a prayer, and finger lunch was served. The workshop lasted for one hour fifteen minutes.

### **3.17 Single mothers’ workshop held at Plange F.G.C.**

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2010-01-02 I met single mothers at the Plange F G C. In fact the conference had started the previous day and was to continue till Sunday, the 24<sup>th</sup>. I had made some arrangement with the local church pastor to attend the single mothers’ workshop scheduled for Saturday. The church had already invited a guest speaker from Shayandima F G C, namely pastor N.

Pastor M.S of Plange F G C is a close friend of mine, and we share many things together, including challenges and breakthroughs in ministry. I had already spoken to him on several occasions concerning my research project. Then as they were organizing the conference that would include workshops, catering for different categories of members, he encouraged me to come and observe the proceedings; also to interview the guest speaker as well as single mothers themselves on my research topic.

It was 14h00 in the afternoon when the workshop started. The first ten minutes were scheduled for praise and worship. Sister G, who was invited to lead in this item, did exceptionally well. She started a powerful song, and every member was both spiritually and emotionally stirred up. Then she read from Psalm 103. She concluded her item by singing “Amazing grace.” You could feel the wonderful presence of God as we jointly worshiped the Lord together.

Then pastor N was introduced and took the pulpit. He preached with much fervency. Everyone was happy and free. After the sermon he called the congregants to respond to the altar call, and then ministered unto them. There were 45 single mothers aged between eighteen and forty-seven. The sermon took thirty minutes.

Most of these single mothers were moved to give personal testimonies, and to share their personal experiences. This was followed by the researcher's interview.

First question: Are single mothers involved in the full church program?

Answer: "The involvement of single mothers in the church program differs from one congregation to another. But it seems like the culture is the same everywhere. Some local churches, (I don't know whether I can say some matured local churches), do not have problems in engaging single mothers to participate fully in the whole church program. But many local churches (and this seems to be the culture in most Pentecostal churches) seem to have a serious problem regarding the participation of single mothers in the whole church program. The F G C seems to value integrity and personal holiness more than the gifts of the Spirit in their members. Good morals are the norm and criterion for service in the F G C." This answer was given by sister G.

"No," responded sister N: "They are not involved because they are undermined, marginalized and suspected of immorality. But our hope is rising because of the new spirit in some local churches. Many Christians do welcome single mothers and give them hope and courage.

"I attended a certain seminar where the pastor even referred to single mothers as 'daughters of destiny,' and 'children of promise.' This is really encouraging."

Sister K answered: "No. This is because the church is not sure of their new marital status. Experience has revealed that most single mothers end up having unhealthy relationships with somebody else's husband. Many families have suffered and even broken as the result of these affairs. I'm a single mother myself and have seen prominent family owners and most regretfully some pastors proposing love to me." As sister K responded in this fashion, the atmosphere suddenly changed and almost everyone was filled with concern. Why should prominent family figures and particularly pastors be attached to these vulnerable women? Do they really mean business or are they taking advantage of these miserable mothers? These are the questions that need a thorough research to be answered.

"Partly yes." answered sister M. "I say so because we see other local churches accepting and involving single mothers in their church programs. For instance, sister T



is a single mother but she is a secretary treasurer in our local church. I know that in many other local churches she couldn't be privileged as such since she is a widow. It is practically very rare to find single mothers entrusted to key positions in the church."

"Yes," responded sister C. "Single mothers are partially involved in the church program. But I believe that a change of heart and mind (attitude) is needed. A lot of people are critical about single mothers participating in the whole church program. I believe that real change will only take place when the church becomes matured enough to confront some of the controversial religious issues that form the ethical core of this problem." Sister C continued: "I don't believe there's any institution outside the church that can help sort out this problem. It is the sole responsibility of the church."

This session was closed. The organizer made some few remarks and announcements. The congregation was invited to a finger lunch, and then departed.

I think the response to this question is revealing a lot of what is going on in the church today. While there are still die hard conservatives in the church, many people are changing. They are engaged in a radical paradigm shift from the status quo.

Even though the discriminating culture has deep roots, a revolution is taking place which will end up accommodating single mothers in the church. Perhaps this is due to the fact that reality is glaring us on our faces; that single mothers are here to stay. The naked truth is that God is no respecter of man. To God marital status is not a priority for Kingdom service.

There is a feeling among the pastors (in most churches) that emphasizing marital status tends to be judgmental and shows lack of support on the part of those single parents whether they were once married or not.

The issue of divorce and single motherhood is of course very challenging. In one of my observations my sympathy went to a miserable woman who stood up and said: "I belong to church. I love the Lord but I have a serious problem. In fact I don't know whether to leave my local church and try another one.

My husband walked out on me and left me alone with children. He got hooked up with another woman who seems to be more attractive to him than I. So she also left her own

husband. They are now married. Two marriages are broken. And both families involve children. Can you imagine? The major problem is that we have to attend the same local church. Can you imagine how my children and I feel seeing them sitting together? I wonder if we are serving the same God. I even make some efforts to challenge this critical issue. But the church leadership seems to be failing to confront this evil.”

### **3.18 Pastors and their spouses’ retreat held at Karibu Lodge**

As mentioned previously on the third of July 2009 we had pastors and their wives seminar held at Karibu. I took advantage of this conference to interview pastors and their wives about single mothers and their serving status in the local church. It was very wonderful to hear different opinions from both pastors and their wives.

Question: Should single mothers occupy leadership position in the local church?

Before attempting to answer this question, pastors and their wives were further asked the following questions as well. What is the attitude of the church as a whole towards single mothers’ participation in the church program? What does the Bible teach with regard to single mothers and widows? What role should pastors play to influence the church to accommodate single mothers in the full church program? What support programs should be designed by the church to give support to single mothers?

Pastor M attempted to answer these questions very carefully. Other pastors, who also voiced their views, were also very polite. Then a thought provoking discussion followed as pastors’ wives too participated. The attention was fully drawn when pastor M indicated that the church is not doing enough to support single mothers. “How many churches, for instance,” he indicated, “have support groups for single mothers? How often are single mothers ever mentioned from the pulpit, except to reprimand or condemn them for infidelity? This often happens without any valid evidence. Pastors sometimes get trapped to condemning these women without any founded proof.” He continued: “At worse they receive judgment and criticism from finger-pointing Christians who stand on the side lines saying: “If you were genuine Christians you wouldn’t have had babies outside marriage.”

Pastor G shared with the congregation about a certain single mother from one of the F G C local churches in the district. He quoted her to have said: "Many married mothers, including some pastors' wives, have left me more embarrassed than ever." I got so frustrated after hearing her saying: "I get so sick of single mothers running around from one man to another, destroying our families; and yet pretending to be Christians and attending our meetings."

After a lengthy discussion about this issue and trying to address the question above, pastor M, who was also the invited speaker at this retreat, took time to indicate how the church, particularly pastors and their wives should be sympathetic toward single mothers. He indicated: "Even though some of the allegations on single mothers may be genuine, the church should still be sympathetic and strive to give direction.

"We as the church should bear in mind that it is very difficult for these mothers to face daily life. Imagine their loneliness at night alone and sometimes dealing with delinquent children."

"Wisdom, discipline, order and proper climate at home is brought by the male figure; namely the father. The role of fatherhood is missing in the mother only parent family. So a sense of direction, authority, norms and values as well as sound morals are lacking in these families. The tragedy of the absent father is lack of respect, fear and irresponsibility.

Proverbs 10: 11, says that "the mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked."

Research indicates that 46 percent single mothers are poor, with wayward children causing many problems. 43 percent of convicts in the state prisons are from single mothers' families.

A high rate of teenage pregnancies, drop outs and rebellious children come from mother only families. Thieves, bully and violent kids full of hatred come from single parent families. So fatherlessness is a major cause of school dropouts, joblessness, drug addiction, and high failure rate. Children need someone to inspire them and this is the father figure.

Psalm 101: 1-2 says: "I will sing of your love and justice; to you oh Lord, I will sing praise. I will be careful to lead a blameless life..."

The above statements provoked a certain pastor's wife who stood up and said: As far as I'm concerned, the church ought to stand up and shame the devil by acting differently." She pointed out that she knows one single mother, in her local church, who has won the confidence of every member. "This is most probably because of the fact that immediately after the death of her husband, the church showed her much support." She went on to indicate that the church is not ashamed of using this mother effectively. Her contributions, even financially are highly remarkable. In fact she is known as the 'mother' in the church.

The lady went on to highlight that "single mothers ought to be given much support so that they may survive the tragedy, and testify to others that God is able to turn one's hopeless situation around. And it is high time for all to acknowledge that being a single mother is not a sin, but only a challenge to be confronted."

I concur with this line of thought because in certain cases single mothers are those who have been left or abandoned by their husbands who were unequally yoked with them. Because these unbelieving husbands rejected their wives sometimes because of the women's faith, these women (now single) should not be regarded as failures, but as the ones who have given sacrifice to their marriages for the sake of the gospel; and the love of the master. So they should be offered tremendous support by the church.

Researchers point out that too often neither the church nor single mothers themselves have that perspective in mind. Often married women in the church are the most despised.

My own observations tell me that the overwhelming majority of single mothers didn't become single in rebellion against God, but rather most became single mothers before they were converted. Most came to know the Lord only after they had babies outside marriage. Often they were not raised in Christian households. Most of them had only a slight understanding of what it is to belong to Christ (the church). By the time they learned to know what marriage entails, and what role it plays in the church, it was already too late.

Another pastor's wife told us of a certain single mother. She quoted her: "Instead of receiving compassion and support from the church, single mothers are conditioned to expect no more than, at best tolerant indifference from the church."

Peggy, a single mother from one of the F G C was reported to have said: "I try my utmost best not to regard myself as inferior Christian. I hold my head high and prove to the world and the church that a woman is no less of a person because she is single. She is not insignificant, but she is complete in Christ; even though she is struggling, to raise her fatherless children." She concluded: "I'm so determined to walk in the joy of the Lord, and I pursue this joy in spite of the surrounding circumstances. The more I seek for my contentment in Jesus, in spite of my status as a single mother, the more real joy I experience."

This reminds me of Linda Davis, (2005) in her book entitled "How to be the happy wife of the unsaved husband." She says: "So if I thought those women at church with a man by their side looked smart and serene, I would look more so too. If they would reflect the joy of the Lord while sitting beside their husbands I would reflect His joy while sitting alone." She goes on to say: "When I saw a woman walking tall next to her husband in church, I walked taller. Christ alone would be enough for me." What a bold statement!

Pastor M concluded the session by saying: "It is high time the church realizes that single mothers are not second-class citizens of the Kingdom. They are women whom God called to a noble and challenging ministry. Single mothers must stop regarding themselves as defeated, failures incapable of rendering effective services unto the Lord. In stead, they should see themselves as wonderful vessels of the Lord faced with the challenging task and responsibility to testify about the unfailing grace of God.

The session ended, and I was privileged to meet with two single mothers who testified how relieved they were after this seminar. They told me that this type of meeting is indispensable. One of them said: "If all the ministers would realize the challenges that single mothers re facing, and try to help them, the picture and the shape of the church would really change." The other lady affirmed and indicated that the image of the change will change drastically if all churches will start with support groups for single mothers.

This reminded me of a workshop we conducted in Zimbabwe at one of the national conferences of the Full Gospel Church Of God. One single mother (with tears on her eyes), she pleaded: “Pastor, will you please help me. I have lost my identity. I don’t know what to call myself now. I have lost three husbands in a row. The first one died in an accident while coming home, from South Africa. The second one died of malaria, and the third one died of cholera very recently. They used to call me mrs C, but after these tragedies I feel so empty.”

Here we are speaking about losing three husbands at a go. The loss of a husband is in itself a tragedy. So this case is an extra-ordinary one. Can you imagine if someone will begin to torture this victim of fate and call her names like it is the case with many single mothers? That’s why generalization and stereotyping of any kind is very dangerous.

The researcher has found out that the challenge of single mothers and how they are treated is a universal problem. The research done both through reading and personal interacting with different individuals reveal that this problem is everywhere, even in the mainline churches or denominations.

### **3.19 Data analysis and interpretation (synthesis)**

The researcher collected data from different sampled population groups and recorded the information.

After collecting and capturing data from the research field, the researcher read through the information captured. He then began to classify the relevant information into themes and categories according to the degree of similarities and patterns.

The data were in some cases recorded in tapes, and also in the form of notes. The researcher read through the data several times and verified the accurateness of the information. He also scrutinized the information to detect possible errors from the data. Then he broke the data up into manageable themes. The analysis of the data enables the researcher to understand the various constitutive elements in the data. Then he investigated the relationships between concepts and variables. The main aim of breaking data into manageable themes was also to observe patterns and trends that could be identified or isolated.

3.19.1 The data reveal the following trends, themes and patterns:

3.19.2 Discrimination and marginalization

3.19.3 Loneliness

3.19.4 Single mothers deprived of key (leading) positions

3.19.5 Single mothers and immorality

3.19.6 Single mothers and religious commitment

3.19.7 Depression and pain

3.19.8 Single mothers and support groups

3.19.9 Stereotyping

## **3.20 Challenges experienced during data collection**

The challenges encountered were very few. The researcher had to convince the participants that he had no secret agenda in interviewing them. This is because he could in certain cases detect some tension when he introduced his research topic to some population groups.

Secondly, he had to translate some of the questions to ensure maximum understanding.

Also, he had to allow his participants to express themselves through the medium of their own language. Some of the expressions don't actually mean the same thing in African languages as compared to English. In certain occasions single mothers would be highly emotional. Pastors also in certain cases displayed some kind of anxiety. Some of them even mentioned that they were ashamed of themselves as to why they didn't realize the need of this kind of workshops before. Lastly, though the churches sampled around Malamulele and Thohoyandou, are close to each other, the ones at Musina are a bit far. It taxed the researcher both money and time to facilitate and conduct workshops there.

### **3.21 Conclusion**

In this chapter the researcher indicated the choice of instruments and methods used for the collection and analysis of data. Sampling procedure and the composition of the focus population group and interview procedure was also highlighted. The researcher also outlined how he captured the data and the analysis thereof. Finally, the researcher highlighted the challenges he experienced during data collection. The following chapter deals with findings and interpretation.



# **CHAPTER 4 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION**

## **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter the researcher intends to highlight the empirical findings and interpretation of the data collected, captured and analyzed in the document. Data were collected during field work from the sampled population groups among some F G C congregations in district three (Limpopo Province). The data collected were used to test and investigate the attitude of the black community F.G.C leadership with regard to the treatment of single mothers in the church. The research deals mainly with the issues of restoring and involving single mothers in the whole church program in the black community Full Gospel Church Of God in district three located in the Limpopo Province. This research was conducted among the black communities in district three.

Workshops and conferences were organized and the sampled population groups were interviewed. The researcher observed some common and similar responses in all the meetings. The church leadership, particularly pastors were very excited about the project and mentioned that it will be an eye opener to the church to focus more on the challenges the church is facing with regard to single mothers and the way they are treated in the local church. Single mothers also were excited and said that they are happy that the church recognizes their plight.

## **4.2 Empirical findings and interpretation**

Among other things participants' responses revealed the following:

### **4.2.1 Discrimination and marginalization**

The majority of interviewees (95 percent) testified that single mothers are indeed discriminated against and marginalized. It was observed that both single mothers themselves and married mothers strongly agree that discrimination is there. Some single mothers indicate that discrimination and marginalization is caused mainly by fear.

Pastors also confirmed that this fear is evident. Married mothers fear that single mothers may break their families. Pastors also report that many other young pastors have placed their ministries in danger while counseling young single mothers. The church leadership also confirms that it is very difficult to convince the whole church to involve single mothers in the whole church program. They indicate that the local church is very suspicious of single mothers. They say that single mothers cannot be trusted. They indicate that this is caused mainly because single mothers are vulnerable since they live in loneliness. Most men take advantage of their vulnerability and trick them into adultery.

#### **4.2.2 Loneliness**

Participants at Musina and Makwarela reveal that discrimination and marginalization of single mothers contribute much toward their loneliness. Single mothers interviewed at Nandoni Dam also testified that they feel lonely. This loneliness (they say) is caused by lack of acceptance and support by the church. 90 percent of the single mothers interviewed from different settings confirm that loneliness is a major concern among single mothers in the church. Some of them even indicate that they feel unaccepted in the church. They further indicate that sometimes they are strongly tempted to leave the church. Reports have been given to pastors that certain singly mothers stay away from formal church meetings because they fell unwanted. Single mothers lament that they feel inferior because they are undermined because of their marital status.

During the workshop held at Nandoni Dam some single mothers vented their anger and frustration saying that they expected pastors and their wives to give them support, but in the majority of cases it is pastors' wives who display more negative attitude toward them. More than 70 percent of the single mothers interviewed point out that pastors' wives are jealousy, and prevent their husbands (pastors) to offer counseling to single mothers.

The researcher was informed that even where pastors were privileged to give counseling to single mothers, they find it very difficult because they are slandered, accused and blamed that they fall in love with them during counseling sessions.

### **4.2.3 Single mothers and leadership positions**

Both the participants who were interviewed at Musina F.G.C and Patmos Revelation Centre (Altein Full Gospel Church Of God) indicated that they were not comfortable with single mothers occupying leadership positions in the church. The researcher also observed election meetings at these local churches and observed how difficult it was for the church to elect single mothers to occupy leadership positions. However, 20 percent of the voters were in favor of certain single mothers and assured the others that they would do well in the committee. In both the congregations single mothers were finally elected as secretary-treasurer.

### **4.2.4 Single mothers and immorality**

Approximately 60 percent of the participants interviewed at Karibu Lodge and Nandoni Dam indicated that they had problems with single mothers' morality. Most pastors also indicate that they are very suspicious of single mothers' morality. They mention that there have been many critical cases in the church in line with this issue. For instance, pastor S told us about a certain single mother who suddenly fell in love with another member of their church. What made the situation more unbearable is that this man is married and he left his wife and children. The pastor explained how painful it was when they both had to fellowship in the same church. Single mothers themselves admit that most of them have problems coping with life alone. But they complain that it is generalization that gives them a problem. They also indicate that if love, acceptance and enough support were given, most of them would do well. Approximately 95 percent of pastors' wives say that they don't trust single mothers. Some pastors indicate that the situation is made worse because there are men who take advantage of single mothers, most of them with the intention of robbing them of the property left by their husbands. I interviewed a pastor who told me that most of the single mothers who suddenly commit adultery shortly after divorce or a violent death are those who experimented with sex before marriage.

#### **4.2.5 Single mothers and religious commitment**

About 80 percent of the participants in the interview indicated that if given good support, single mothers in the local church tend to be more committed both spiritually and financially than their married counterparts. They attend prayer meetings and conferences more frequently than married mothers. It was also indicated that single mothers support the church financially and in kind better than their counterparts. About sixty percent of the participants in the research point out that single mothers tend to display their skills and talents, and are more hospitable than married ones.

#### **4.2.6 Depression and pain**

Almost 95 percent of the people interviewed reveal that single mothers live in pain and depression. Most single mothers participating in the interview in different workshops, e.g. at Nandoni Dam and Karibu Lodge indicated that they live in pain and depression because of the nasty experiences they are going through. Victims of divorce and violent death state that the trauma brought by these experiences is endless. They also relate the pain of living with anger and shame after divorce or rejection. According to the findings in this research single mothers are also burdened by the responsibility of taking care of their fatherless children. Some pastors understand that this burden can be lessened by the church's support. The challenge of the children raised by the mother figure only is both economically and morally. More than eighty percent of those interviewed share that it is very difficult to forgive their spouses after divorce. They mention that the pain is more exacerbated by the jealousy that burns through them when they see their spouses with their new lovers.

This is rendered worse if they have to attend the same church. Single mothers relate that the trauma of divorce and violent death also affect their children badly. They also point out that their children get more frustrated and angry when they see their fathers in the company of a new family. A certain single mother emphasized the pain and anger displayed by the disadvantaged children when they watch strange children enjoying the benefits that belong to them. A pastor who has done research about the disadvantages of divorce states that more than seventy percent of the divorced mothers end in depression. Another single mother, a victim of divorce vented her anger about a man

who destroyed her virginity and walked out on her, leaving her with an unwanted baby. The majority of the interviewees mention that even if one does well financially, it is still very frustrating to raise the fatherless children alone. All children need a father figure. When asked how this affects their church life, most single mothers report that their experiences left them with a sense of guilt and self condemnation. They share that they live in shame. A single mother from Patmos Revelation Centre lamented that most single mothers feel inferior and cannot enjoy fruitful Christianity because they live with guilt, anger, bitterness, frustration, jealousy and unforgiving spirit.

#### **4.2.7 Single mothers and support groups**

The majority of single mothers that were interviewed strongly agree that support groups are needed to give them support. They confess that experiences of divorce, violent death and a loss of relationship; in any way, for instance, someone walking out on you, leave them deeply wounded, physically, psychologically and spiritually. Single mothers in Musina and Malamulele strongly agree that the church needs to come with some strategies that will ensure strong support for single mothers. They mention that the trauma that follows sudden death and divorce leave them so vulnerable and miserable that they really need support from fellow Christians who understand their situation. They complain that very often they are left alone or with people who don't care.

Single mothers at Makwarela and Makuleke also strongly support the idea of developing support groups in the church. They expressed their wish that pastors should come with strategies to form and train support groups consisting of women of experience and also well mannered men to assist them in various ways on how to deal with their painful passes, and cope with the present situation. They suggest that if properly trained support groups are developed, they can meet regularly and share experiences and receive advice on how to cope with life in spite of their married status.

#### **4.2.8 Stereotyping of single mothers by the church**

About 85 percent of all the participants in the interviews from different sampled population groups strongly agree that single mothers' behavior is the same everywhere. Findings in this research prove that the attitude of the church towards single mothers is

very questionable. This is solely because in most cases the church doesn't have any evidence to prove that all single mothers don't live right. Without any justification single mothers are criticized for things they are not necessarily responsible. This kind of bias is very serious, because it contributes a lot towards the discrimination of single mothers in the black community Full Gospel Church Of God at district three in the Limpopo Province. In most cases the church's perception of single mothers is uninformed, ignorant and prejudiced. But very few people in the church do realize that this tendency tends to hurt even innocent single mothers. My findings after interviewing certain church members verify that most single mothers are aware of this stereotyping and feel very disappointed about it.

I have interviewed some pastors in the Full Gospel Church Of God in different settings, and they confirm that stereotyping is very detrimental to church growth. It affects church growth numerically, spiritually and morally. Most church leaders I interviewed assert that the church still promotes the traditional belief that marriage is the primary goal of life. Any woman who lives alone, more-specially if she has children out side the wed lock is regarded as immoral and is not acceptable to the church.

#### **4.2.9 The fate of single mothers in the church**

Since the objective of this research project is to find out if single mothers are restored and involved in the whole church program, the researcher tried his best to interview different church members, the church elders and pastors from different congregations. About 95 percent report that the attitude of the church towards single mothers is so traditional and biased that they find no acceptance. Single mothers themselves complain that the only time you can hear single mothers mentioned is when they have to account for some nasty accusations which are not even founded.

Single mothers blame pastors and their wives that they contribute to their being neglected. They complain that pastors fail to teach the church properly on how to treat single mothers in the church. They further complain that most pastors' wives contribute much toward their fate because they are highly suspicious of them. Single mothers emphasize that some pastors' wives have some fears that single mothers may break their families and bring chaos in the church.

The researcher has taken time to compare his records from Musina, Makwarela and Malamulele, including those compiled in conferences and workshops, e.g. at Nandoni Dam, Makuleleke and Patmos Revelation Centre. His findings are the same. The participants who include single mothers agree strongly that local churches are not doing enough to respond to the plight of single mothers in the church. They also agree that those needs must be addressed and that a new approach should be followed.

#### **4.2.10 Interpretation**

From the above findings the researcher understands that single mothers really present challenges to the church. These challenges are rendered worse if one wants to lead the church according to tradition. Traditionally the dignity of a woman was guaranteed by her marriage. In the past most of the church folk participating in the church program comprised of married couples. The strength of marriages boosted the church maturity. Unfortunately things are changing drastically. Marriages are threatened by separation, divorce and violent death. The victims of this high death rate are likely to be women aged between 30 and 40. This increases the number of young widows, and hence single mothers in the church. Also, there is the challenge of young women who are victimized by man who are not man enough to keep families. These men seduce young women and leave them with fatherless children. So it goes without saying that the mushrooming of single mothers in the church will remain a serious obstacle. That's why the church must wake up and come with strategies to challenge the status quo and build the church that will equally accommodate both married and single mothers. The dilemma of the church today is that it is composed of the people who still appreciate the traditional way, while on the other hand there are people who would like to challenge the status quo. There are people who understand that the situation as it is today in the church needs to be challenged. On the other hand there are those who are comfortable with the status quo. While we agree that the plight of single mothers in the church is a serious challenge, we must also agree that wisdom is essential while dealing with these delicate issues in order to avoid promoting immorality in the church.

On the other hand, the issue of divorce and single motherhood is a serious threat for the church growth. I interviewed a very miserable single mother who lamented saying: "I'm

so miserable. I love the Lord but I am battling from within as to whether I can leave my church or stay away from other meetings because I am hurting very badly by the way I'm treated.

My own observations reveal that the overwhelming majority of single mothers didn't become single mothers by choice or direct rebellion against God. But rather most became single mothers before they were converted. Most of them wish they should not have been cheated. And others are victims of divorce and violent death, things beyond their control. So the church should consider all these factors while dealing with single mothers. They must understand that some of these situations may occur to anybody at any time.

In my opinion workshops are needed now, where the church leadership can be well equip on how to redeem single mothers from their fate. If proper follow-ups and implementation can be done, new development will take place in the church; and single mothers will feel accepted. There is a sense of urgency in dealing with this case because single mothers are in the majority in the church. If nothing is done to challenge the status quo, the church is heading for a serious collapse. Most pastors also strongly agree that if single mothers are restored and empowered, they can contribute a lot in the church because they form the majority in the church.

When the researcher assessed the testimonies and experiences shared by single mothers from different congregations, and compared the data with the responses of pastors and other church leadership, particularly pastors' wives, he realizes that the situation in the Full Gospel Church Of God, at district three, in the Limpopo Province; is such that single mothers really need support. All the reports and evidences given by different participants in the interviews point to the fact that single mothers are hurting in the church and need special attention. For instance, a certain single mother lamented saying: "It seems like the qualification for genuine church membership in the Pentecostal church is a marital status."

One interviewee, at Plange Full Gospel Church, pointed out that: "It has become the culture of all Pentecostal churches to have problems regarding the involvement of single mothers in the church program."



I think the responses by different participants in the interviews are revealing a lot of what is going on in the church today. However, many church members are becoming aware of this challenge. Some are ready to come with strategies to improve the situation and encourage single mothers to feel accepted and to get ready even to occupy leadership positions.

Of course, this does not mean that single mothers will be randomly placed at any position without checking on them. A strong monitoring and support will be conducted to ensure that the integrity of the church is not threatened. There is a strong feeling among the Full Gospel Church pastors that emphasizing marital status in the church tends to be judgmental and shows lack of support on the part of single mothers.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

This chapter is one of the most important chapters in this research project because it exposes the empirical findings and interpretation on the objectives and the purpose of the study. The findings from the field work reveal that the Full Gospel Church Of God (district three) in the Limpopo Province has serious challenges with regard to restoring and involving black single mothers in the whole church program. According to responses from the sampled population groups in district three, single mothers in the black community church of the F.G.C are faced with:

- discrimination
- marginalization
- rejection
- loneliness, and lack of support
- are suspected of immorality
- are denied opportunity to occupy key (leadership) positions
- live in pain as a result of loneliness and sometimes poverty
- live in trauma (some are victims of divorce and violent death)
- some are depressed and often unproductive

- often struggle with guilt, shame and self condemnation
- are broken in spirit, heart sore, disillusioned and often starved socially

The church leadership also confirms that it is very complicated to convince the local church or church leaders to accommodate single mothers into the whole church program. The research findings also confirm that single mothers themselves feel inferior and lack confidence to maximize their potential because they are undermined.

The researcher has also found out that the challenge of single mothers and how they are treated is a universal issue. This problem is almost everywhere in the church. The research done both through reading and personal interaction with different individuals reveals that the problem is everywhere, including the main line churches and other denominations. It affects independent churches as well. In all the churches sampled, participants indicate that there is a serious need for support groups for single mothers. They also suggest that if these support groups can be in place, these groups can help a lot to restore, encourage, recognize and engage single mothers in the whole church program. The following chapter deals with the situation as it should be, and includes the biblical perspective.

# **CHAPTER 5 THE BIBLE AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE (THE SITUATION AS IT SHOULD BE)**

## **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter is very crucial in this thesis because it suggests the situation of single mothers (as it should be) in the Full Gospel Church Of God In South Africa in district three of the Limpopo Province, amongst the black community. After researching on the situation as it is, the researcher discovered that single mothers in the above-mentioned setting present a serious challenge. It was discovered that the church finds it very difficult to restore and involve single mothers in the whole church program. Once a woman loses her marital status she is viewed differently from other mothers. This is particularly with regard to their involvement in the church program. Therefore, the researcher in this chapter wants to present the situation as it should be according to the biblical perspective as cited from both the OT and the NT. Also, he will present the situation as it should be by reviewing how single mothers were treated both by the early church and the apostles. Then he will come with suggestions for today's church to restore and involve single mothers in the whole church program.

The method that will be used in this chapter in dealing with biblical passages will be running commentary (not exegesis). When I'm referring to commentaries the reference is to the passage under discussion, page numbers will not be provided.

## **5.2 The Old Testament and single mothers**

### **5.2.1 Hagar is shown mercy**

There is an interesting story narrated in Genesis 16:1-10. This story is about Hagar, the mother of Ishmael and Sarai's servant. Sarai had offered her to Abram her husband so that she could bear her a son. According to Unger (1981) God's delay to fulfill the promise to Abram was the human side of Abram's testing. The problem was due to Sarai's unbelief and lack of patience in waiting for the appointed time. To mitigate the

problem Sarai came with the suggestion that Abram cohabit with Hagar, and Abram consented to the idea. It goes without saying that Sarai's suggestion that Abram should take Hagar for a wife represents a human makeshift to help out God (Barker & Kohlenberger 1994; Hamilton, 1995; Unger, 1981).

It was customary during the days of the Patriarchs for a barren woman to procure a surrogate wife, a maidservant, or a next of kin and present her to her husband to bear her children. Therefore to deal with the problem of her infertility, Sarai offered her maid to her husband. The intention was that Hagar should bear him an heir. It was apparently acceptable within the social custom in the ancient near-east in those days (Barker & Kohlenberger 1994; Hamilton, 1995).

Much emphasis was placed on the indispensability of (male) progeny to continue the family line. Therefore Sarai was obliged to act the way she did. During those days it was common place for this to occur. The mistress of the house had the right to offer her maidservant to her husband to bear her a child. This child would belong to the mistress. In other similar cases, the senior wife would organize a marriage between her husband and her younger sister or any close relative. In these cases also, the children born would belong to the senior wife. There is a number of references in the OT men having one or more concubines, e.g. Caleb (1Chr. 2: 46,48 ; David, 2 Sam 5: 13; Solomon 1King 11: 3).

So we read in the Bible: "Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had born him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar, so she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her. Abram agreed to what Sarai said (Gen. 16: 1-2)."

However Sarai's plan does not meet with God's approval (Barker & Kohlenberger 1994:25) This is also shown in the following scriptures: Gen 17: 15-19; cf. 11: 1-9;12: 10-20;13: 1-12; 14: 21-24.

Hagar has no choice in this matter. She is taken and offered like a vessel. This story also reflects the replacing of marriage's primary goal of partnership, (Gen. 2: 18) by that of reproduction, spoiling its original intent. Sarai's original motive however, is frustrated

when Hagar becomes arrogant after her conception. Surely Sarai did not anticipate the tension that followed (Hamilton, 1990).

Abram yielded to unbelief which resulted in family conflicts and caused unnecessary unhappiness. Failing to maintain stability in their faith, both Abram and Sarai created a room for family turmoil which was rendered worse when Sarai accused her husband of betraying her. Hagar, an innocent victim was delivered to Sarai who began to mistreat her. Unger (1981:62) comments that Abram “cowardly shirked his husbandly duty and delivered Hagar, an innocent victim to Sarai. She displayed harsh treatment and injustice in dealing with Hagar.”

The Bible tells that after her conception she began to despise her mistress. Consequently Hagar was ill treated and subjected to hard labor by her mistress, Sarai. So she decided to run away.

The Angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was a spring that is beside the road to Shur. And he said, “Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?” (Gen.16:17-18).

Hagar answered that she was running away from her mistress Sarai. What is interesting here is that the angel of the Lord appeared to her and admonished her to go back and submit to her mistress. God cares for everybody. But what is more interesting here is that the angel was so kind and encouraging. He said: “Go back to your mistress and submit to her.” God offered a blessing to Hagar as she obeyed Him and submitted to Sarai. She was given an assurance that she would bear a son, and that he will be named Ishmael because the Lord has heard her misery. This is because Hagar was afflicted by Sarai. God is concerned about the afflicted. His grace is sufficient to all people.

Hagar feels highly blessed of God because He has heard her affliction and she names Him “The God of seeing,” for she said He has seen my affliction. In His blessing of Ishmael God reiterated both his original blessing of all humanity in Genesis 1: 28 and his blessing of Abraham in Genesis 12:2 just as the offspring of Isaac would form a great nation of twelve tribes under God’s blessing (Barker & Kohlenberger; 1994; Unger, 1981; Hamilton, 1995).

So Ishmael was born and there was temporary comfort to Hagar.

Unfortunately the celebration of Isaac's coming of age marked the expulsion of Hagar and her son Ishmael.

“The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar had borne to Abraham was mocking, and she said to Abraham, “Get rid of that slave woman and her son....(Gen. 21:8-10).”

So it is quite clear that Sarai is not necessarily concerned about Ishmael's behavior. She was jealous that Ishmael would have a share in the inheritance with her son Isaac because during those days the law provided that he was entitled to a share of the inheritance. “Cuneiform law indicates that the son of a slave woman had a legal claim on his father's property (Hamilton, 1995:80).” So Sarah forces her husband to violate this law. But a son by a slave woman could forego his inheritance claim in exchange for freedom (Unger 1981; Hamilton, 1995).

Hagar and her son Ishmael were reduced to great distress. On the way their provisions were spent, and Ishmael was sick. Hagar was in tears and in great sorrow. She was worried for her son's life. This made her forget God's promise about her son.

In this distress God graciously appeared for their relief. He pointed that he had heard the voice of the lad. Now Hagar experiences the divine visitation for the second time. The angel assures her of the cognizance God took for her sorrow. God has heard the voice of the lad where he is, in the wilderness. God repeats His promise about the destiny of Ishmael, and opens her eyes that she sees a well (Barker & Kohlenberger (1994; Hamilton, 1990).

Barker & Kohlenberger (1994) and Hamilton (1990) elaborate that it was normal in those days to receive a visitation from God. Before Hagar's experience with the angel, Abraham had already had some angelic visitations from God. Sarah too, was visited by an angel. Before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot as well had a visitation. The way God treated Hagar in these experiences was very special because God did not just come to her rescue and supplied her present needs, but despite her situation God made His promise that Ishmael her son would become a great nation. So in this promise God implied that nothing would destroy Hagar and her son. Their life, future and destiny were in God's hand.

By this time Hagar had become a single mother who had to go and raise her child by herself. But God showed some concern. He recognized her fate and intervened. This is what the church should do. God is a merciful God and He expects mercy from those who worship Him.

Let us look again at the narration and observe God's concern and intervention in His children's plight. The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking. And she said to Abraham: "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac (Gen 21:10). So Hagar left again with her son. On the way she observed that the water in the skin was finished, and there was a threat for her baby. Full of frustration and fear, she put the little one under one of the bushes, and left him to weep at the distance, for she thought: "I cannot watch the boy die." The Bible says that God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter?" Then the angel of the Lord assured her not to be afraid, and he provided a well of water. Again here is clear evidence that God cares. The church also should display this tender care.

God's gracious treatment of Hagar is justified. He is a God of mercy. Besides that, Hagar did not rebel against God. She had been subjected to this predicament by Sarah, who then threw her away. Sarah should have foreseen the trouble in time and avoided offering Hagar to her husband. It seems like God is giving Hagar a special treatment here. But we know Him to be a gracious God. It is His nature to bestow mercy to the afflicted.

Both primary and secondary data collected in this research reveal that the position of single mothers in the church is pathetic. The information from literature review from different authors, indicate that single mothers are faced with discrimination and are marginalized. As it is indicated in chapter 2 above, different scholars point out that the church should respond more positively towards the needs of single mothers and their children. In order to encourage single mothers to feel accepted in the church, pastors should train the church members to be more sympathetic towards single mothers. The

church should create an atmosphere conducive for single mothers to participate freely in the church program. It is now high time for the church to undergo a paradigm shift from the trap that entangled the traditional church in believing that being single is being miserable (Mbugwa,1995;Lauren, 2001).

### **5.2.2 God defends the case of the fatherless and the widow**

Fatherlessness is becoming a very serious problem in our nation. Of course fatherlessness is a direct result of single motherhood. However, the church should adopt a positive attitude while dealing with both single mothers and their children. Widows too, contribute much to the fatherless increasing in number. Young widows become single mothers as well. So both single mothers and widows present a serious challenge to the church today. The church and its leadership, as well as the entire members should follow the biblical guidance while dealing with single mothers and widows. God defends the case of the fatherless and widows. In Deuteronomy 10:18 the Bible says: “God defends the case of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing.” Deuteronomy 24: 17-23 says: “Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge.” Verse 19 reads: “When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow...” The Bible demonstrates great care for the fatherless and the widow. This should open the eyes of the church today.

Concern for the underprivileged (cf. Deut. 10: 18-19; 14:29; 16: 11; 24: 6, 10-15) is based on Ex.22: 21-24; 23: 6, 9; and Lev. 19: 9-10; 23: 22. The Law commanded the Israelites to act kindly toward the alien, the widow, and the orphan. The alien and the fatherless must be granted justice, and the widow’s cloak must not be confiscated to pay debts. This obligation stemmed from the fact that Israel had to sacrifice as a token of gratitude to remember their deliverance (Barker & Kohlenberger 199).

According to Craigie (1976: 311), “Provision is to be made for feeding underprivileged people, such as aliens, orphans, and widows.” During the harvest any sheaf left by mistake was left there for the poor and the alien. Even olive trees were beaten in such a manner that olives fell to the ground to be picked. On picking up these olives laborers were advised not to be careful to pick up all. Those left on the ground were to be picked



up by the aliens, orphans, and widows. “This legislation makes sure that resident aliens, orphans, and widows, though not owning land, might share in the fruit of the land (Craigie, 1976: 311).”

This practice of charity was not only done to obey the law, but was a way of expressing their thanks giving unto God who had delivered them from Egypt, and had given them a land of their own. God emphasized the importance of land ownership and inheritance. So those who were not privileged to own a land were privileged to have a share with those who owned the land. This helped them to maintain their dignity and not to feel deserted (Craigie, 1976).

The principle to be drawn from this law is that the church is obliged to show mercy to the underprivileged, and in the case of this study, single mothers and widows. We should always sympathize with single mothers and the fatherless. The church should give proper support to the single mothers to build them and restore their confidence and involve them in all the church activities. Even where we detect some pitfalls, as the church we should not despise them or reject them, but rather we should restore them, love them and accept them. God is love, and the church owes no man anything save love. After all the church is a haven of safety and a rehabilitation center for everyone, including the destitute and the addicted.

### **5.2.3 Single mothers and widows as intercessors**

In 2 Sam 21:10 there is a heart touching account of a widow called Rizpah, Saul's concubine. After King David had surrendered Saul's seven sons to the Gibeonites to be sacrificed as the objects of revenge for the destruction that the Gibeonites had suffered in the hands of Saul, Rizpah displayed an unparalleled compassion for them. She sacrificed her health risking for the safety of their hanging bodies. Verse 10 says that “Rizpah daughter of Aiah took sack cloth and spread it out for her self on a rock. From the beginning of the harvest till the rain poured down from the heavens on the bodies, she did not let birds of the air touch them by day or the wild animals by night.”

Risphah is badly affected in this carnage and loses her two sons (21: 10). Her extreme behavior might have been motivated by her determination to prevent the shameful disposal of her sons, and to protect them from birds and wild beasts. Exposure to birds

and animals was a penalty for covenant violators in Israel (Jer. 34: 20). “For a corpse to be left exposed to the birds and beasts (1 Sam. 17: 44, 46; Ps.79: 2; Jer. 16: 4) was a great dishonor and punishment (Anderson, 1989: 250).”

Rispah’s devotion to the dead young men challenged David to think of the honorable burial of Saul and his son Jonathan (Anderson, 1989; Arnold, 2003).

In this story we see the passionate heart of a widow who sacrificed her pleasure and her health for the dead young men. She was touched by the fact that they were innocent and that they were sacrificed for the evil deeds of their father. One can quickly see a powerful intercessor in this old widow. And this brings us the message that single mothers and widows can become very powerful and dedicated intercessors in the church. In other words, the church needs these mothers as much as they need the church themselves. So the church is encouraged to restore single mothers and widows and train them for the ministry of intercession. It is a pity that we still find Christians who want to display self righteousness and the holier than thou attitude. This is not genuine Christianity. It is hypocrisy.

#### **5.2.4 Ruth, a widow is shown mercy**

The book of Ruth deals with the problems and concerns of a single family in Bethlehem. In this book a story is told of Naomi, an old widow who encouraged her daughters-in-law (young widows) to leave her for a better future. She says in chapter 1, verse, 11 : “Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me?” She wishes them to go home and if possible be married again. That is restoration in social sense. She does not wish them to suffer or to be written off just because their husbands are dead. This is the attitude the church should display. Single mothers, no matter what the cause of their single motherhood is, ought to be shown mercy. They should be restored and given maximum opportunity to participate in the whole church program.

Our concern in this study is to observe at Naomi, a widow, and her daughter-in-law, Ruth (also a widow). We consider how God shows them mercy, and learn that God cares for the poor. Ruth’s loyalty to Naomi is very important because it attracts God’s favor for her. Ruth ends up happily married to Boaz, a kinsman redeemer. What a turning point!

Before their marriage Boaz shows her mercy and encourages her not to go to other fields to glean. She was also granted protection and the privilege to food and water in the company of Boaz's servants. "Boaz showed his increasing interest in Ruth by inviting her to share the noon meal with his reapers (Barker & Kohlenberger 1994: 372)."

Ruth was also granted access to glean among the sheaves, and not only to pick leftovers. "Moreover, they were to pull stalks from their bundles that had not yet been tied up... and leave them to her (Barker & Kohlenberger 1994: 372).

Ruth presents without doubt strongly the concept of divine providence. Here one sees how God is concerned with the underprivileged. Her serious commitment to Naomi and her God brings to her a tremendous reward she never dreamed of. Her bond with Naomi is a type of the covenant relationship between God and Israel. It also implies the Deuteronomic theology (Dt.28: 2).

Ruth's determination to cleave to Naomi has become a classic expression of devotion and loyalty. She took a giant step of faith and saw herself incorporated among the Lord's people. Her insistence of loyalty to Naomi and her God constitutes a classic passage in world literature (Barker & Kohlenberger 1994; Unger 1981).

Ruth is a great example of humility. She is a good example of a single mother who believes in working hard with her hands even under severe and mean conditions. She is determined to go and glean from morning to sunset. As a Moabite damsel (young woman) she was a foreigner and as such had a special claim to the gleanings (Lev.19: 9-10). Her character appearing in her desire to glean in Boaz's fields reveals her outstanding passion to work. She hates to eat the bread of idleness, and enjoys taking pains with pleasure. God sees her tender heart and unites her with Boaz, a kinsman redeemer. To me this sounds like the church because it is the only institution that can put broken lives together.

In chapter 2 of the same book, Ruth is shown mercy by Boaz. He allows her to glean in his field freely, and to get enough to sustain her family. In verse 8 he says: "My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. "Boaz's generosity overwhelmed Ruth. He urged her to remain and glean in his fields,

promising her special protection (Unger 1981: 354).” The special favor showed Ruth by Boaz was not just given to show kindness, but as a reward for her good character and devoted loyalty to Naomi.

The story unfolds and tells us how Ruth really found mercy from Boaz, a close next of kin of Naomi’s husband. She finally gets married to Boaz and bears him a son called Obed. This kind of mercy was God ordained because Obed became the father of Jesse, the father of David. So Ruth played a major role in the genealogy of the Messiah.

Boaz was very kind to Ruth, and demonstrated to her a great deal of favor. Boaz’s kindness to Ruth to allow her to glean freely in his field was in line with the Law, because she was an alien (Lev. 19: 9, 10). God is well pleased with a tender and a generous treatment of poor widows and strangers.

Ruth’s restoration to the family also restored her once discouraged mother-in law, Naomi. Naomi, who at one stage was so discouraged and called herself Mara (bitterness), now became happy and hopeful. Chapter 4: 16-17 says: “Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. The women living there said: “Naomi has a son.” What a consolation! Suppose Naomi had thrown away Ruth after the death of her husband, she would have forfeited the joy of having another ‘son’. Who could have thought that Ruth could bear David’s ancestor and contribute to Jesus’ genealogy?

This is a lesson we as the church should learn from. The church is called upon to cultivate a positive attitude towards single mothers and support them so that they can freely participate in the church program and bring about fruitful results in the glorious kingdom of God. Every person has potential to achieve greatness no matter what their background and past may be.

Single motherhood is not necessarily a curse. It is also not necessarily a sin. Many young ladies with a good upbringing end up being single mothers, sometimes because of some factors beyond their control. It becomes a terrible night mare for instance, for a young lady who has been brought up in a Christian family, and who behaves well, only to end up being cheated; and left with a fatherless baby. In certain cases a very wonderful and useful young lady gets married with an admirable young man with prospects of success, but unfortunately a sudden and violent death takes place, and

she remains hopeless and helpless. This is where the church must intervene and restore the miserable young woman and assure her that she fully belongs to the church.

### **5.2.5 Elijah is taken care of by the widow**

The Bible records a wonderful event in 1 Kings 17: 7-16. "Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. Then the word of the Lord came to him. Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food." So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?" As she was going to get it....'

In the above cited passage the Bible narrates how God took Elijah to the widow to feed him. During those days widows were the poorest of all the citizens. This one is for instance preparing a last meal to eat and die with her son. Elijah's message of assurance is that if this widow obeys God, He will sustain her and her son until the draught is over. He assures her that the flour and the oil will not be depleted if she obeys him.

Although this widow was poor and in need of food, immediately she obeyed the prophet of God, God began to supply her needs and to provide for the needs of the prophet too. Here we see that her faith is rewarded, and the prophetic word is honored (Anderson 1999).

This is a significant example that teaches us that God cares for the widows as well. The argument I want to make here is that if God saw significance in that poor widow, and sent His servant to be taken care of by her; the church also needs to recognize and honor single mothers and widows. It is the duty of the church to see to it that single mothers and widows are taken care of. Pastors and their wives should take the initiative to see to it that this is done properly.

The situation as it should be in the church should resemble the pattern of the scriptures. In the Bible nobody is discriminated against. All people are treated equally. If the church follows the pattern of the Bible, the less privileged will also be accorded a place of serious consideration. Some scholars agree that single mothers need somebody to talk

to and relate to in the church in order to overcome their loneliness. The challenge of poverty also must be addressed. The church should follow the biblical example like we have seen in the case of Ruth. It is the responsibility of the church to see to it that the needs of single mothers and widows are met. The church should come with some strategies and means to supply for the needs of the poor.

The church should shift from the traditional order where both the mother and her daughter were subjected to severe discrimination when the daughter got a baby outside marriage. Of course it is the duty of the church to teach both parents and their daughters to live right. But while teaching people about holy living, the church must also show mercy to those who have already missed it. The Bible is very clear. 1 John 3: 11-12 says: "This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother." So the church leadership, particularly pastors, should strive to promote this principle in the church. God is love. God so loved the world that He gave HIS BEST. This kind of love (Agape) is a divine mandate. There is no other way we can win the world for the master and his kingdom. The church is called to be highly committed to love all the people. By showing this kind of love, we can be able to reach even the people trapped in other religion.

Munroe (1992: 32) points out that the primary goal of all people is to be committed to the service of the Lord, irrespective of marital status. He emphasizes the importance of every person to God. This is the situation that the church should adopt. The statement made by Monroe in the above-mentioned reference is very challenging. Hear him say: "There is no special anointing that comes with marriage." He goes on to say: "The word disciple is more important to God than spouse." If all people in the church, including ministers and those in the leadership should have the same attitude, the church would be different. The church is called upon to take care of all the people regardless of their marital status. Therefore the church should encourage single mothers to feel acceptable and wanted because God is not necessarily impressed by our marital status, but rather by our heart condition.

## 5.2.6 Elisha prophetically provides for the need of a widow

In 2 King 4: 1-7 we are told of a heart rending event that took place during Elisha's ministry.

“The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha: Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the Lord. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves.”

This widow had been left in an impoverished condition after the death of her husband, and the creditor had come to claim her two sons in payment for the debt. According to the law during those days the boys would have to continue in servitude until the year of Jubilee (Unger, 1981). .

According to Unger (1981: 500) Elisha's ministry was designed to demonstrate that God cares for His people, and graciously undertakes for them. As far as God is concerned there is no need, personal or national that He cannot meet.

The above quoted scripture continues to reveal how God, through His servant Elisha, intervened and saved this widow from her dilemma. This teaches us that God cares for all the people. The Bible constantly teaches us that God always shows compassion to the needy. Because the church represents the Kingdom of God here on earth, then she should constantly display this character.

It is interesting to note that Elisha privileged this widow to participate in solving her own problem. Elisha could have performed a miracle of multiplying the oil by himself, but by the divine guidance he chose to involve the widow. He firstly taught her that the little you have can be come plenty in the hand of God. Then secondly he taught her how to run a business.

The provision of oil is conducted behind closed doors, and the participants are only this widow and her two sons. Elisha excuses himself from the scene to prove that this miracle does not necessarily depend on his presence, and also to indicate that there is no trick about it. This oil is a divine gift that shows God's providence to His people.

“The usual form of the verb ‘pour’ seems to indicate that the oil is made to pour continuously until the jars are filled (Konkel, 2006: 413).”

Elisha introduced to this poor widow a business she never thought of. He encouraged her to borrow many vessels from her neighbors, lock herself in the house with her two sons and begin to pour the oil. Unger (1981: 501) reads that the widow was to shut the door upon herself and her sons, privately in the presence of God. She began to pour the oil into the borrowed vessels until they were all filled. When the vessels were all filled, the woman called for another vessel. If there had been more vessels, the oil would have continued pouring. The limitation was not in the supply of oil, but in the lack of empty vessels. The Lord is gracious. He is the father of the fatherless and protector and keeper of the widows and the poor. Then after the oil had stopped, he intervenes and advises her to use the oil and sell some. That is wonderful.

God hates idle hands. God enjoys working with us. He has a role to play in our every day life, but we also must play our part. God blesses the works of our hands. In most of our prayers we usually say that God may help us. But if we could listen in our spirits, we can hear God saying: "Do something yourself, then I will help you."

God is a God of action, and He demands action from His people. Faith and works supplement each other.

"The woman responded in faith and, miraculously, all came to pass as Elisha had promised. The fact that she was to act in faith would enlarge her faith (Barker & Kohlenberger 1994: 541)." Elisha gives her this special assignment and stays away so that she can develop her own faith and be able to practice it even by the time he will leave her house. Elisha teaches the church even today to realize that charity may not only be granted, to meet the needs of the poor temporarily, but that the poor may also be encouraged to run their own business and thus be able to continue with life independently. (Barker & Kohlenberger, 1994; Konkel, 2006).

This reminds me of some years ago as a lad, and I was left by myself alone at home with very little to eat. My mother had gone to farms to try and earn a living. Every day I would take of the little maize-meal that was left, make a simple prayer of faith, and by God's grace I'll cook and eat to my satisfaction, and the meal would still be left. How amazing. This I cannot forget because it is a personal experience and testimony.



The church learns from this miracle that we must make the most of what we have. Although this poor widow had only little oil, the prophet encouraged her to borrow many vessels. We also take note of the fact that the oil increases during the process of pouring. This is an act of faith. Elisha's miracle will only take place when we put our faith to work, for faith without works is dead (James 2: 17).

There should be a special ministry designed for single mothers in the church. The church should be taught to learn to hate sin, but love the sinner. The church leadership should recognize the pain of the divorced and single mothers and offer support, love and acceptance, in stead of criticism and rejection. The local church can excel in reaching out and providing care for hurting individuals by helping them resolve and work through the grief and pain that they have experienced. Jesus in his ministry focused much on showing compassion to the less privileged.

During Jesus ministry here on earth women and children were not taken into serious consideration. The church should know that Jesus was the first one to alert the Jews to honor their wives and respect their children. That is why the early church developed a different opinion of women and children.

Isaiah 1: 17 reads: "Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow."

Again here we are taught that God in deed cares for the widows and the fatherless. There is no way He can display His mercy to the fatherless without caring for their mothers too. God cares for us all. The church is challenged to learn from God and love all the people. The Bible says that love covers many sins. The Bible is very clear concerning the attitude that the church should have towards all people. Unfortunately tradition and custom have penetrated the church and influenced the mind of the people to develop bias and prejudice toward one another. This judgmental attitude has caused grievous mischief in the church. It is highly ironic to perceive that hatred and divisions are more rampant in the church than in the world. One pastor indicated that this is mainly caused by self-righteousness and the holier-than- thou art mentality.

## **5.3 The New Testament and single mothers**

### **5.3.1 Single mothers can be used as managers**

In 1 Tim 5: 14 Paul commands young widows to manage and preside over their homes. In other words if these widows (and single mothers) know how to manage themselves and their families, the church should grant them ample opportunity to manage the affairs of the church where necessary.

Yoder (1985: 407-408) believes that an individual needs to be encouraged to operate independently in order to enjoy wholesomeness. He further endorses that single women can play a major role in the church to promote church growth. According to this researcher single mothers have a special opportunity in the Christian community. I believe this is the stand that the New Testament takes with regard to the treatment of single mothers.

In the book of Acts 16: 11-15 Luke narrates how Paul met a lady called Lydia (possibly a widow) in the city called Thytira. She was found in the company of other women. The narrator tells that she listened to Paul attentively. Lydia was a sincere worshipper and she was prepared to receive the heavenly truth spoken by Paul and his companions, and as she was faithful to the grace of God that she had received, God bestowed upon her more grace and revealed to her the truth of the Gospel.

She also opened her door to her house for the apostles. Lydia had an honest calling to think about. "Lydia like her own people was famous of her skill in the manufacture of purple dye (Bruce, 1988: 311)," yet she was a worshipper of God, and used the opportunity to improve on her religion. She believed the message of Paul and the other apostles and received Jesus as her personal Savior. She most probably became a first convert in Europe. She then was baptized together with her family. To prove her sincerity in her faith she began to initiate a strong relationship with the apostles.

This was a business woman (dealer in purple cloth) who invited the apostles saying: "If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house (Acts 16:15)." Although the apostles seemed to be adamant at first, she entreated them so cordially to grace her house if they accept her as a genuine convert to Christianity. She was so

eager to use such entreaties and persuasions until they agreed to lodge in her house (Fernando, 2006; Bruce, 1988).

Bruce (1988: 311) indicates that women in Macedonia were privileged under Roman law to run legal businesses on their initiative and independently. So Lydia was an independent business woman of reputable and godly character.

Here we notice that single mothers can be encouraged to own their business, and sincerely serve the Lord at the same time. Religion does not necessarily forbid us to make efforts to run a business. Lydia was a highly committed and devout woman, and had a good character and a famous reputation that won her many friends. She was very positive and friendly, even to strangers (Acts 16: 15).

This woman was the mistress of her own house, with other members of her family. Lydia was a woman of great influence, and consequently her faith and conversion to Christianity motivated her entire family to believe also. She had opened her heart to the gospel and was a worshiper. Paul and his group were grateful and accepted the invitation. She was very kind to the apostles, and very desirous to be instructed further in the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. Lydia played a major role propagating the gospel to the west. This tells us that the early church had high regard for women, and single mothers and widows in particular. So the church today should follow the same example.

In 1 Cor. 7: 8 Paul says: "Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am." The unmarried whom Paul speaks about in this passage are in the church. The question of the convenience, and the inconvenience of marriage in the church, has always drawn much attention among the ancient philosophers, though many inclined to decide against it. This was because of the troubles connected with it.

Paul's inference that all men in the church should abstain from marriage, was in reference to the necessities prevailing in the church during those hectic periods of persecution and religious turmoil (the present distress: verse 26). He also endorses that women too should stay unmarried.

Blomberg (1994: 132), comments that Paul's central point in advising on the issues of singleness and marriage is to stress that couples should not be in a hurry to change their marital status. Also, it is note worthy to understand that Paul advised believers to remain single only because of the situation in the early church during those days. He advised that it was much better for its single members not to encumber themselves with domestic embarrassment.

Paul states that if these women stay unmarried, they may contribute a lot to the propagation of the gospel. They will be so free in their operation that nothing will hinder them. In other words Paul endorses that single mothers can be of great help in the church if they are restored and allowed to serve freely. This is evident that the early church recognized and trained single women and involved them in the church program. This means that today's church too, should follow the steps of the early church. The church should know that it is ungodly to reject single mothers and widows. The apostle in the above passage implies that single mothers and widows in the early church played a major role. So it goes without saying that for the church to be complete, all the members of the society must be fully accepted and accommodated.

## **5.4 The early church and single mothers**

### **5.4.1 Divorce and remarriage**

In 1 Cor. 7: 10-11 we read: "To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife."

Divorces were easily obtained among the Jews, and as a result remarriage was very common. However, this was contrary to the original plan of God. Paul commands that should any couple divorce, they should remain unmarried, or else think of reconciliation. Polygamy, or the marriage of more than one person, as well as fornication and adultery, must be a breach of marriage covenant and a violation of the partner's rights. The apostle further indicates that if a man or a woman is married to an infidel, or in a polygamous marriage prior to conversion, they are free either to stay in the marriage or to leave. The apostle asserts that God has called us to peace (1Cor. 7:8-15).

From the above cited scriptures and comments we understand that it was the duty of the early church to give advice to both the married and the unmarried. And this can be done with success if the church displays love to both the married and unmarried. The early church did not discriminate against single women, but accepted them and guided them to live a holy life. The mandate of the church is to train all its members to fear the Lord and to live right. So the importance of members in the church should not be determined by their marital status, but rather by their commitment in the service of the Lord.

The church should promote fellowship among both married and single mothers. Meetings should be organized to accommodate both the married and the singles. In these meetings they can be encouraged to discuss issues like God's will for their lives and future. The value of fellowship with other members, family life and other themes such as sin and forgiveness, blessing and curse can be taught in these gatherings. Mutual relationships where sharing of goods and property is encouraged, should also include single mothers as well.

Single mothers should be taught to understand that God loves them unconditionally. God is love. He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son. The plan of redemption covers us all. If single mothers realize that the church accepts them, they will be confident enough to benefit the church with their various skills. After all the biblical meaning for family includes all people who have committed their lives to God as opposed to blood relationship.

According to Maston, (1983: 19-40) the biblical family is to promote the Kingdom of God on earth, and to provide understanding, love, and the companionship for its members. If the church is really a home for the saints, then it should be a place of support and love for all the members. Pastors and the church leadership should stand in the gap and display the compassion of Christ by loving and accepting single mothers unconditionally. While he was still here on earth, our Lord Jesus Christ displayed this kind of compassion and taught about it very accurately. For instance, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, (Luke 10: 25) Jesus teaches that brotherly kindness is displayed in action and unconditionally. Jesus also indicates in this parable that it is highly taxing to

practice this virtue. Just as the Good Samaritan rescued the victim between Jerusalem and Jericho, it is the duty of the church to come with the strategies to assist everyone in need, including single mothers.

The victim cited above was physically wounded by robbers, but the single mothers are wounded by circumstances such as divorce and violent death. The church will be failing in its duty if it continues to neglect single mothers and widows.

Just as much as he challenged the old order of dominance and submission, Jesus also championed a new status and dignity for women – both married and single. I believe that if Jesus had to instruct us on how to treat single mothers in the church today, he would instruct us to show them grace.

In the same tone Paul sets forth the charter of liberation for the church (Gal.3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” This freedom, I believe includes the repented single mother as well.

## **5.5 The church today and single mothers**

### **5.5.1 Support groups**

The church should form single mothers’ support groups which will teach single mothers various practical skills like plumbing, carpentry, and other mechanics.

Because single mothers tend to have more time than their married counter parts, they can benefit the local church in a remarkable manner if given an opportunity to do so. Many pastors confirm that single mothers can also contribute much toward church growth, even financially. Therefore I agree with these researchers as mentioned in chapter 2 and other sections of this research who state that the church should come with some social programs of some sort whereby single mothers could meet others and share personal experiences. Godly men and women should come together and form support groups dedicated to help single parents to cope with their fate. The church should rather be a part of the solution to single mothers than to be a part of the problem.

The information obtained from these different researchers as cited from different sources above confirm that if single mothers can be given adequate support and opportunity to participate in the whole church program, these mothers have more potential to promote church growth than is generally believed. Both primary and secondary data collected by the researcher support the fact that most of the profitable and flourishing projects and businesses are run by single mothers.

Therefore the church is advised to try her best to come with programs to support, restore and involve single mothers in the whole church program. The local church has a tremendous task to minister to the needs of this segment of society who are often neglected to navigate alone through the catastrophic crises (situation) and experiences.

Most of the pastors interviewed support the view that people who are filled with God's compassion and the healing virtue of the Holy Spirit should minister in support groups to offer assistance to the victims of divorce and other single mothers. If well monitored, such ministry programs can bring spiritual help and emotional healing and restore courage, hope and confidence to this less privileged people.

All church folk should develop the same attitude of support toward single mothers in order to restore them so that they may gain confidence and be able to maximize their potential.

Single mothers in the church need someone who will encourage them and assure them that they can remain in the church and render important services in spite of their marital status. They need to be cautioned that divorce, deception or the death of a beloved one is not the end of the road. They need to be encouraged to understand that they can survive those storms of life and remain effective in the Kingdom of God. Love, acceptance and restoration will always put these people together and restore their self-esteem and confidence to serve the Lord freely.

Larson (1990), for instance, tells of one woman who was deeply wounded and hurt after the divorce was followed by an organ transplant. This woman was so depressed that she almost died. But when the trained group in the church ministered to her she soon recovered. The support group advised her that she should learn to cope with this

crisis situation and face life without her husband, surrender everything to God and live on. They also advised her on how to cope with her ill-health.

People who are hurting need support. The church should always be ready and be available to minister unto the broken hearted, including single mothers. People who are hurting also need role models for their vulnerability. Pastors and other church leaders should avail themselves and also offer assistance to single mothers by bringing them together with the experienced ones who have travelled this road before them. By sharing their pains and past experiences together, these victims of fate may recover and become very useful in the ministry of the church.

From the literature reviewed and recorded in chapter 2 above, it is evident that global awareness and interest is surfacing now for the attention that should be given to single mothers, not only in the church, but also in the temporal world. The church is becoming aware that God is not necessarily impressed by marriage, but by the heart condition. God is interested in people who are committed to the Kingdom business. The church is also becoming aware of skills and talents in single mothers, and the desire that they have to dedicate themselves, to working effectively in the local church.

Single mothers are yearning for productive relationships and warm fellowship. They are also in need of nurturing, caring and spiritual guidance. Single mothers confess that they long for a place of acceptance, where they can experience a sense of belonging. They also need support from their fellow church members with whom they can share similar problems and concerns (Spann, 1996).

Ensworth (1982: 21) points out that the church is required by the Bible to come along side of people who are hurting, and offer them the redemptive healing grace of God. The church is also expected to come with ways of understanding the needs and concerns confronting the single adult women and lead them into reconciliation rather than alienation. This will assist single mothers to develop hope for themselves and their families.

In the book of Galatians 6: 2 we read: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." It is the compelling duty of the church to train the church members to live according to this scripture. Paul teaches the church about the power of



unity. He says that the church is the body of Christ. If we are really the body, it means that no one should be isolated. We should learn to practice brotherly kindness and show one another mercy at all the times. Therefore, single mothers should be brought together with other church members and be given the opportunity to share their personal experiences. For if people share their troubles and challenges they will surely discover that theirs are just minor inconveniences compared to their fellows' hardships. This kind of comparison can take place in support groups where fellow members share their personal experiences.

This reminds me of someone who said: "Challenges are the ingredients that make the soup of Christianity sweet."

A certain single mother confessed that she used to live in guilt and was always feeling shameful, rejected and miserable. But after her restoration she devoted herself to training young girls to live differently. She says that she became a minister of reconciliation. She developed passion to nurture these young girls and mentor them in becoming different. It has become her passion to see these girls transformed and develop into a revolution of chaste girls, different from their generation.

Consequently the church should become aware of the fact that single mothers have needs and characteristics that are quite unique, and that they are willing to participate in various church programs and projects.

Many researchers strongly believe that the single parent family needs assistance. It is also agreed that most disciplinary problems detected in secondary school learners (aged between 14 and 18) reveal that most of these troublesome learners live with single mothers. Children raised in this type of family set up need intervention from the office of social development and welfare. These officials can help to bring organization, order and discipline to these children. Healthy communication is also very critical to children from single parent only families. The church may play a major role solving disciplinary problems from single mothers' children. The emotional and spiritual welfare of these children, living with the mother only, is also the church's responsibility.

The church should take note of the fact that single mothers and their children are people of remarkable value and therefore are worthy of productive relationships. It is the duty of the church to bring about these relationships.

Maston & Tillian (1983: 19-40) point out that the Biblical family has a duty to promote the Kingdom of God on earth. The church should provide understanding, love and companionship for all its members, including single mothers. The church should strive to come with some strategies to remedy brokenness in single mothers. It is obvious that single mothers have been hurt by death, divorce, rejection, and all other causes of their parental status.

Traditionally, the church is family oriented in the sense that she accommodates families where both the father and mother are present. Because in some cases singleness in parenting is a result of sin, the church fails to tolerate single mothers. But it is high time that the church should learn to separate a sinner from sin. Inability to separate sin from the sinner causes rejection of single mothers by the very local church that should offer support in these cases.

In the mean time single mothers may lead their families successfully if support by the church is offered. The hope offered by faith can bring about transcendent quality to family life despite the hardships faced by single mothers. Therefore the church needs to create opportunities for single mothers to share their experiences with others. It is very difficult to reach single mothers because so many obstacles compete for their time. Financial pressures and caring for children are some of their pressing needs.

In one of the conferences held at Impala, the researcher discovered that 95 percent of the respondents in the interview strongly agreed that single mothers are faced with severe financial pressures. Therefore the church should develop sensitivity to single mothers and their pressing needs. Another important thing that the church needs to take into serious consideration is that the trauma in single mothers is exacerbated by their fear that their situation may remain permanent. While dealing with single mothers the church should show support and compassion. This will motivate and encourage them to realize that someone cares for them. Even their morality may be boosted in this way.

As it has already been indicated in this research article that single mothers live in loneliness, it is then the task of the church to keep them occupied doing something for the Lord. Among single mothers in the church there are those who consider remarriage, after divorce or violent death. Their challenge is that it is not easy to meet someone who is suitable and emotionally stable to trust. Another challenge is financial security. In most cases even if single mothers can find someone who is ready for marriage, that man may be faced with financial difficulties to an extent of even taking the little that the single mother has. Another issue of major concern is that these single mothers would prefer to meet a man who is born again.

The church should always advise members to be very careful choosing life partners. In this way the church must try to come with practical solutions and to encourage all those single mothers who live alone.

### **5.5.2 Single mothers' conferences**

This thesis indicates that most single mothers are outspoken about their position. Also, there is a serious awareness that the church leadership should work together to exhort and help single mothers in the church. Therefore the church should regularly organize conferences for single mothers, where they can express themselves and share personal experiences. It is the church's duty to display the grace of God to all. If we as the church focus only on the spiritual aspects of single mothers, we will miss a lot. Other than their spiritual welfare, single mothers are faced with extreme financial and emotional pressures.

These conferences should cover a variety of subjects that will equip single mothers and empower them to face different challenges of life. The responsibility to raise their children on their own and to pay for their education impacts on them seriously. If the church empowers them through effective conferences, they can gain confidence and also improve on their spiritual capacity. These women must be taught how to rely fully on God.

The church should be encouraged to invite single mothers regularly out to social events. Church members should be advised to accept and love single mothers and invite them to their functions. During Christmas times the church should invite single mothers to

share joy with others. This is the time when fellowship and communion both with one another and with the master is very important. During these occasions relationship and trust can be improved amongst both married and single mothers.

Most single mothers have lost their dignity and identity the time they lost their spouses. When they are fully recognized and engaged in the church program, not only their dignity will be restored, but also their identity in Christ will be restored. In these gatherings single mothers must be inspired to understand that their self worth and personal identity don't necessarily depend on anybody else, or on their marital status; but on the Lord. They must be assured that their future and comfort is in the hands of the master, and that the Holy Spirit is their comforter. He is the one who stands with them to give them support.

Single mothers who received adequate support from the church testify that they have learnt to accept their situation. Some even testify that they feel good being single after having experienced dysfunctional marriages. A certain single mother confessed that she would rather be alone than have another failing relationship.

Traditionally the church tends to focus mainly on marriage and families, and sadly single mothers are neglected. But with the awareness about the need of single mothers, the church is encouraged to come with social programs of some sort whereby single mothers would meet with others to share personal experiences. In these occasions they would even be exposed to the company of godly single men.

Single mothers can also be encouraged to go on outings together, to attend picnics, walks and hikes. In addition to having fun, single mothers can also be empowered by being trained in various skills. They can also be encouraged to run small businesses, and where resources are available, they can also start major businesses. Single women can also be equipped to run profitable projects, like poultry farming. They can also grow some crops and collect some income. These activities would lighten the burden of taking care of their children. Women who are kept occupied in this manner cannot feel the sting of boredom and loneliness.

Another important thing the church must consider is the uniqueness of single mothers. If we know the case we are dealing with, it will be easy for us to handle it well. For

instance, it is often said that women who had been happily married, after the death of their spouses, they consider getting married again quickly. But those who had had poor marriage relationships don't even wish to marry again.

It is also said that single mothers who were engaged in pre-marital sexual relationships, tend to be loose. The church should do some sort of counseling to investigate these cases because these are the factors that determine the attitude and behavior of single mothers in the church.

The church should also teach Christian married women to have more confidence in themselves and their husbands. This would minimize their suspicion over single mothers. It is a known fact that most married women, including pastors' wives are threatened by the presence of single mothers in the church. They see them as potential danger to break their families because there have been many cases where single mothers fell in love with married men in the church.

It is high time the church returns to its roots and origin. The church leadership must understand that the church is a gathering of believers who are supposed to be united in love (for one another) irrespective of color, gender, financial or marital status. This is the most significant thing needed in the church to accomplish the purpose wherefore the church is established. The Bible indicates very clearly that the church must accommodate widows, orphans and strangers, including the sick and the poor. There must be programs in the church that will cater for the needs of these people.

It goes without saying that every church will have single mothers, bachelors, spinsters and the less gifted ones. The church must also realize the value of single mothers in the church. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul stresses the advantage of singleness in the ministry. So the church should be discouraged from making fun remarks about single mothers and the other less privileged members. In stead, the church should be very supportive to single mothers and recognize them as part of God's flock. Remember, the good shepherd left 99 sheep to search for the one that was lost. This means that every member is very important to the master.

While drawing annual church programs the church should allocate ample time to cover single mothers as well. The researcher has already indicated that most single mothers

have confessed that they have stopped attending some worship services because they feel neglected. The church should therefore show concern for single mothers and their problems. The apostle Paul quoted from Exodus 33: 19 in the letter to the Romans to encourage the church to show divine favor to the disadvantaged ones, namely widows. The same Bible that rebukes sin also shows a way of mercy, grace and forgiveness. So the church should encourage and assist single mothers to seek for mercy and forgiveness from God. After their repentance, single mothers should be restored and offered an opportunity to render services unto God freely.

Single mothers' workshops and conferences should be arranged where single mothers may share personal experiences and enjoy fellowship with one another. This will instill in single mothers a sense of belonging. So it should be the mission of the church to recognize and include single mothers in the whole church program. A regional conference held at Impala on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July 2008 revealed that there is a great concern for single mothers in the church because they are being neglected. The conference speaker indicated that it is the duty of pastors in the church to teach and train members to accept and love single mothers. At the same conference it was agreed that conferences and workshops should be organized for single mothers.

Another visitor at the same conference, however, indicated that a gentle and polite approach should be used while inviting single mothers to these conferences. This is because it is sometimes very stressful for them to attend such meetings. If not well handled, these meetings tend to trigger their trauma, because they remind them of their marital status and very often, their nasty experiences. This visitor also pointed out that: "confronting family issues is a formidable task for all the pastors."

There was a unanimous decision that seminars and conferences for single mothers should be arranged. It is a known fact that the church, very often organizes meetings and functions for the couples. Single mothers too should be given more attention. The church should learn to focus on single mothers and form forums where they can express themselves.

As stated above, there are many single mothers in the church who have the desire, time and skills to bring about a tremendous progress in the church and in the community. These highly skilled women can also do well in leadership positions.

Prayer meetings and intercessory sessions can be used effectively to encourage single mothers and widows in the church. We all know that old women have ample time to pray and that they are high devoted to prayer. It is the duty of the church to identify talented single mothers and train them to host various events for other single mothers. Activities such as Bible studies and home cells don't necessarily call for marital status. Single mothers can initiate and conduct these activities successfully.

### **5.5.3 Single mothers' workshops**

Workshops for single mothers are very essential to motivate single mothers and train them to overcome inferiority complex. So the church must organize programs where single mothers can come together. These programs should be arranged in such a way that single mothers be inspired by motivational talks, talk shows and prayer meetings.

In these meetings single mothers should be encouraged to share personal experiences with one another. In order to encourage them to attend in large numbers, the church should advertise and publicize these programs very well, say, by the use of attractive posters, local news papers, the radio, T.V, etc. Attractive statements of advertisement should be displayed on the church bulletin board and other public places. Statements such as: "Are you single? Come and have fun with others!" or "The joy of single motherhood." These statements can attract the curiosity of many single mothers. Motivational speakers should be invited to address single mothers in these workshops.

According to the findings on this research article, the church is becoming aware of the systematic discrimination on the basis of marital status amongst women in the church. This awareness should bring a remarkable change in the local church. It is a known fact that world-wide women have been disadvantaged for ages. But there is a tremendous paradigm shift globally now. The argument here is that if the world is dealing with the

challenge of discrimination effectively, how much more should the church deal a heavy blow against single mothers' discrimination in the church.

The gap between married mothers and single mothers in the church should be closed. The stereotyping of single mothers most, of whom live in severe poverty clearly represents an inherent and prima facie case of discrimination. Single mothers by virtue of their socio-economic disadvantage should rely on the acceptance and support of the church for their survival.

We are now aware of the fact that single mothers are highly suspected of immorality and other forms of unbecoming behavior. One way to protect them from these bad influences is to ensure that effective training be given to them to build strong moral and religious principles. These training programs should start as early as possible. Girls in their teens should be prepared to cope with the challenges and the plight of the youth, which include dealing with issues pertaining to teen-age pregnancies. Girls must be taught the value of obedience, modesty and chastity. These are basic moral principles that should be observed by all young women. The church should train, first of all women teachers in the area of moral principles, which they may pass on to young girls.

The suggestions above don't necessarily mean that legalism should be promoted in the church. The training should be done in a positive manner to build the character of these young women and alert them of the pending danger should they become loose in life

Women (both married and single) are expected to be modest and well behaved because they bear the responsibility to preserve the moral fiber of both the family and the church. Women's influence is not only confined to the well being of the family and the church, but also of the community, as a whole. As the mothers of the next generation both married and single mothers are expected to instruct their children in the norms and values of the community.

So the church's task is to make sure that these women are encouraged to receive sound doctrines themselves. Since the mother is the inspiration and standard of reverence for her children, if the offspring are found to be rude, brutal, and licentious, the blame may be shifted to the mother.



In order for single mothers to fulfill their primary function as mothers, the church must step in and guide them accordingly. Being suspicious of their morality and rejecting them will render the situation worse. But tackling discrimination head on and promoting equality of opportunity amongst both married and single mothers should become the major focus of the church. This will enable the church leadership to build a fairer church in which everyone has a chance to fulfill their potential.

Most pastors and other leaders in the church unanimously agree now that tackling discrimination of single mothers will bring considerable benefits in the church. It will also help to attract, motivate and retain single mothers in the church.

The church's influence on the moral character of single mothers is arguably one of the most needed issues in the life of the church universally. Through various structures the church may devote its time to promote the welfare of all single mothers. The church is known for its reputation to rebuild family relationships and to restore dignity to those who are hurt, particularly the poor and the powerless.

We all know that the survival of both the family and the community depend much on the moral teachings of the church. It is therefore the supreme duty of the church to train both married and unmarried mothers in the church so that they may play key roles in transmitting proper moral behavior pertaining to sexuality to their children. The church's key role through both married and unmarried mothers is to teach children social, ethical and moral values.

Adolescent girls should be advised by well trained women in the church to uphold sexual morality until they get married and are ready to raise a family. This will prevent unnecessary single motherhood and other immoral practices in the church which cause disgrace to the whole church order. There's no way the church can ignore these moral standards because that may result in not only bringing a moral vacuum, but also the breakdown of family life.

The traditional role of the mother is synonymous with family establishment. There's no proper home that can be established without a mother. Therefore we can understand that mothers are special, whether married or single. The responsibility to bear children, nurture them and take care of them for growing and development is the sole

responsibility of the mother. Through all ages, in spite of dynamic changes in their socio-economic roles, the role of women as mothers has overwhelmingly remained intact.

The primary stimulation of every child is met by the mother. We all know that most needs for stimulations are instinctive, and it is the duty of the mother to give support to the child during its various stages of development. Because the church consists of members from the family, the strength of the church depends solely on the strength of families. It is a known fact that the stronger the family, the stronger the church. Even the temporal world today is very aware of the role of the mother, both married and single. The occasion of 'Mothers' Day' is used by both the church and the secular world to teach about the important role of the mother. The church also, while realizing challenges facing single mothers, should not in any way imply that single mothers are inferior to the married ones, because this can affect their children negatively.

The church can also use the context of Mothers' Day to teach members of the church certain values, skills and norms that are initiated by mothers at home. In this manner all church members will recognize the importance of mothers in the family, the church and the community. Also, pastors should congratulate single mothers for the efforts they make both at home and the church, to bring their influence to the young ones. This could be a very stimulating experience for the members of the church, and it can also help them attach equal value to both the married and the unmarried. The question of equality, which is the cry of all the people, should be emphasized and promoted first in the church.

#### **5.5.4 Single mothers' restoration**

In the earlier chapter of this research project it was indicated that women in the church form the majority. And because of high death rate, separation, divorce and other causes, single mothers outnumber their married counter parts in the church. This increases the need for the church to restore, train and accommodate single mothers in the church program.

When issues of discrimination on the basis of marital status are not effectively confronted, church growth and effectiveness will decline. Single mothers and their

children suffer tremendously as victims of discrimination and marginalization in the church. The church up to now has done very little to address this and offer support to these less privileged ones.

There is no doubt, that traditional assumptions that single mothers don't live right, have so penetrated the church that for decades single mothers have suffered severe discrimination. The good news is that most church leaders now have become aware of the fact that the status quo should be seriously confronted. Yet to conclude that all single mothers don't live right does a great damage not only to single mothers themselves, but also to the church as a whole. It affects their children as well. So the church is advised to teach all members and church leaders to change this negative mind set. Single mothers should be restored, trained and involved in different church activities. They must be encouraged to run projects and programs in the local church. Those with outstanding skills and abilities should be given opportunities to get involved in the various committees as well.

We know that there is particular emphasis placed on the need for high ideals and moral virtue amongst single mothers. There has always been some fear in the church, about the moral welfare of the church, concerning the behavior of most single mothers. Single mothers have always been labeled as traps for the innocent. Just as much as the church was opposed to dance halls, some books labeled "the bad book", the indecent paper, referring to news papers, the motion picture, the immodest fashion in female dress - all of which tend to destroy the virtuous characteristic of the church; single mothers also are regarded as threats to men in the church, including pastors. Unless this myth is cleared, this suspicion will continue to ravage the church and mar its progress.

Of course this kind of suspicion and discrimination is an old tradition. Jesus curbed this tradition, but the church is slow to understand and to change. In the gospel of saint Luke 7:37 we read: "When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then

she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.... (Luke 7: 37-50).”

Luke continues and narrates that when the Pharisee who had invited Jesus saw what the woman was doing, he became offended and started to judge Jesus saying: “If this man was a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is- that she is a sinner.” There are people who conclude that this woman was a notorious prostitute. Others suggest that she was just a mere heathen dwelling in that city. But the truth is that in today’s understanding she would be classified among single mothers.

The Pharisees wouldn’t believe that Jesus was a conscientious observer of the law when they saw him permitting this woman to touch him. They also argued that if he allows her to touch him because he doesn’t know that she is a sinner; then it means that he is not a prophet.

Jesus answered and indicated that this woman did a good thing. He also indicated that those with many sins express their appreciation more than those with little sins, when both are forgiven. In other words he stressed that a man’s love to God will be in proportion to the obligations he feels himself under to the bounty of his master (Luke 7: 37-50).” Jesus recommends the action of this woman. He points out that since her many sins have been forgiven her, she is obliged to love much. The actions which the world blames, through envy, covetousness, or malice, God delights in them and puts them in record, so that we may all learn and understand his ways.

Jesus illustrated this with a parable of two men owing money to a certain moneylender. He also challenged the self righteous Pharisee that he didn’t show him much hospitality since he entered his house.

This attitude which prevailed among the Jews during Jesus’ earthly ministry should be dealt with much seriousness in the church today. Jesus emphasized that he came to seek and save those who are lost.

In my opinion, single mothers should be restored, trained and encouraged to cultivate high self esteem; and be committed to the services of the Lord in the church. If they feel

accepted and wanted, they in turn will master self – esteem and self – control and live right

The church is the institution with the unique responsibility and has strategic power not only to produce and sustain life, but also to instill socio – religious values and moral standards in the family and the community. It is also the duty of the church to bring the ministry of healing and reconciliation to all people. Most single mothers have lost hope, and they need the church to instill into them a sense of hope and optimism because they live in despair. The role of the church to do so is closely related to its involvement in various processes and efforts to resolve conflicts amongst the married and unmarried women in the church.

However, pastors should be very careful dealing with these issues, taking into serious consideration that there may be single mothers in the church who are not living right, and who may misunderstand the grace bestowed upon them for license to continue living in sin. There might also be circumstances such as divorce and remarriage or where single mothers are promoting immorality.

In their conferences pastors should create an atmosphere conducive to resolve these sensitive issues so that the grace of God should not be used at the expense of His righteousness.

Some researchers indicate that the church must be careful while dealing with single mothers because they are vulnerable. Conferences should be so organized taking into serious consideration the fact that most single mothers have been traumatized. Special attention and care should be given while dealing with them. Their behavior in most cases is a result of the trauma they have suffered. So the church should not always jump into conclusion that their morals are questionable. Some of these behavioral tendencies are symptoms of the trauma they have been subjected to.

Single mothers look very much like other women on the outside. Most people, who have suffered from trauma look like everyone else. The difference surfaces when they are faced with real challenges and pressures. If charged with responsibility most often single mothers will over react or resist some church orders. This does not necessarily mean that they want to behave in this manner, but this happens as a result of bitterness

engraved in their hearts. So they need someone to restore and motivate them. This will enable them to understand that God's grace is sufficient for them.

Of course dealing with single mothers in the church is highly critical and challenging. I have seen single mothers who are highly committed to the service of the Lord. They give cheerfully. They pray and work hard. But in spite of their dedication they sometimes tend to fail decimally to satisfy the moral standard of the church. These women put the pastor in a dilemma. He doesn't know how to handle them. They benefit the church with their offerings and services, but at the same time they, tarnish the image of the church by practicing immorality. So the pastor needs to use wisdom while dealing with single mothers in the church. He must not focus on one aspect of single mothers at the expense of other moral issues.

Before entrusting single mothers with important duties and positions in the church, the pastor should come with strategies to restore them. Proper trust must first be established with them, and they must also be trained. In the process of their training, single mothers must be assured that God loves them as much as He does the entire church.

The decline in morality amongst most single mothers should not be used to develop or encourage stereotyping against all single mothers. There are many factors that influence their behavior. Sometimes their behavior is an indirect rebellion against the church leadership because single mothers think that the church doesn't trust them. If the church can win the confidence of single mothers by showing them compassion, their attitude may change, and they can live right.

Another factor to be taken into serious consideration while dealing with the restoration of single mothers, and to involve them in the church program, is their uniqueness. Their differences in viewing things should be highly considered. For instance, there are single mothers who prefer to belong to single women's home group, while others are more comfortable with mixed single home group, or to socialize with married couples and families.

The role of the church should be to provide varied opportunities to all church members. The church must also establish cell groups which are formed according to different skills

and talents, not necessarily based on gender issues, or marital status. Days and time for attendance may be allocated to allow specific people groups according to their skills and talents. Certain days will cater for instance, for those who will do say, singing or cooking, etc.

In this way various skills will be developed while on the other hand single women find the chance to socialize with others. Their skills will also benefit them to participate in the community projects as well. This will enable single mothers to maintain their dignity and self – esteem.

When the church stages functions, pastors and other church leadership should make sure that single mothers are also included. The role of pastors and the entire church leadership is to take care of the sheep in the body of Christ. All members are equally important and significant before the Lord. They have all been equally redeemed. So the church should take initiative to arrange for and facilitate the social activities for single mothers.

God commands the church to look after the sheep and it is imperative that the church be able to identify those grey areas that need focus. Skills development seminars and workshops should regularly be arranged to train single mothers in various skills. Single mothers should also be advised to inter-act with legal and financial advisers so that they can be well informed pertaining to legal issues and financial management, issues that are very important today.

Most single mothers are free and enjoy a sense of independence, and are therefore wonderful assets, both in the church and the community. They enjoy a certain degree of freedom and independence, and as such they can become very useful in the church. For instance, single mothers are free to make a choice on how to spend their money. The marketing agencies have already taken advantage of this economic impact that single mothers make. Research shows that the marketing agency has now shifted their focus and efforts to single mothers. Many of the segments of the market, housing, food, banking, retail, and many others are managed and monitored by single mothers. Single mothers are also more likely to own homes, purchase luxury items and take more frequent trips (Koons & Anthony, 1991).

The church also like business and marketing agencies should take advantage of the impact that single mothers make in the public industry. Every pastor longs for and desires church growth. Single mothers can contribute a lot to church growth both numerically and financially.

Another remarkable characteristic of single mothers is their ability to make friendships. In describing their feelings about their sexual relationships, single mothers agree that their sexual activity is confined within a significant relationship. This, (they say) makes them not to feel guilty about having sex with someone to whom they were not married.

Most single mothers are concerned with their future and also with their daily social life. Although some assert that they are comfortable with their single status, most indicate that they also yearn for the place of acceptance where they can use their skills and gifts freely. The church may be a wonderful home for these disadvantaged ones.

Therefore all pastors and church leaders are advised to recognize single mothers who are passionate about hospitality and care, to offer them opportunities to accommodate visitors and host various church events. In fact the church should realize that single mothers are yearning for inclusion in the whole church program. After all there is a need for this kind of inclusion so that everybody should see the church as it should be. The church is composed of both males and females, young and old, married and unmarried, black and white, educated and uneducated, the rich and the poor, the healthy and unhealthy, the ignorant and the enlightened ones (Bill, 1983).

The Gospel dynamic was clearly intended progressively to liberate women. That is why women in the early church were affirmed and engaged in various ministry activities. From the way in which the early church affirmed women (even single women), one can tell that discrimination, though it is an old habit that reasserted itself in the church order, is not God's idea. This old habit influenced the church to undermine women, and consequently the single mother in particular was marginalized.

What I am endorsing here is that it is high time to critically question the status quo in the church with regard to the treatment of single mothers. Single women have suffered significantly badly through rumors and suspicions that are not even founded on any solid evidence. The church and its leadership need to confront this tendency squarely.



Jesus' attitude toward single mothers broke with the patriarchal view of single mothers. In other words Jesus challenged the traditional order of marginalization and discrimination, thus championing a new pattern that promoted dignity and respect for single women.

In order for the world to appreciate the church, we need to break away from the traditional hierarchy of superior and inferior roles in the church. This can be only achieved if the church leadership joins in a new creation which fulfills God's original purpose for mankind.

It is a known fact from the Bible history that women, both single and married, have impacted the early church in ways beyond explanation according to opportunities granted to them. Those women played tremendous roles as Sunday school teachers, and as missionaries, world wide. These women, working in groups as well as individuals made tremendous impact and brought about significant influence in the history of the church; by among other things raising fund, writing hymns, giving testimonies and serving as intercessors in the Body of Christ.

T.D. Jakes, (1993: 5) asserts that "divorce is not merely separating, it is also the tearing apart of what was once joined together." I agree with him when he points out that even though it might be healed, it doesn't heal easily. But the good news is that Jesus specializes in healing broken and torn hearts.

In Luke 4: 18 we read: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to preach the Gospel..." Commenting on this verse, T.D. Jakes (1993: 6), points out that "approximately five out of ten marriages end in divorce." He further indicates that these broken marriages and homes leave victims with broken dreams that were never fulfilled and children living in a terrible night mare of facing life without a father-figure in the house

The church needs to intervene and offer support to these victims of fate. Through the ministry of the church, the master himself will heal these disadvantaged ones. God will also deal with the long-term effects of their tragedies. The above-mentioned author goes on to say that "one of the great healing balms of the Holy Spirit is forgiveness. That's where the church fits in. In stead of emphasizing guilt and condemnation, it is

high time that the church must preach the Good News. The Gospel (Good News) is the grace of God whereby we were saved. We must always remember that we were not saved because of our good works. We were saved because of what Jesus Christ did. He gave His own life as a ransom for us. That's grace. It is not necessarily because of who we are, but because of who he is. It is the duty of the church to teach disadvantaged people that God will not fail them. The biggest mistake we often make as the church is to think and conclude that when people have failed us, God has failed us as well. That's the devil's blatant lie. God says in His word: "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." (Heb 13: 5).

Unfortunately most abused women and those neglected because of their marital status tend to go to legalistic churches who regard God primarily as a disciplinarian, ready to condemn all the times. To these people, the idea of fatherhood in God always brings to them a sense of guilt and self condemnation. They are robbed from enjoying the loving grace of their father. The church should become matured enough to be able to separate between morality and legalism. We must also understand that the church is not necessarily a school of morality. It is only the grace of God through our faith in Jesus Christ that will usher us to genuine godly holiness.

The church is a home for all. We have in the church wounded and hurting people. Although in some cases we have young women who break boundaries and become lascivious and get out of control, and indulge themselves in immoral behavior, when they come to church and repent, we are obliged to accept and give them support so that through our ministry they can experience the grace of God. In fact the church's primary task and duty is to provide chances and opportunities of salvation and healing to all the people.

The church must continuously follow the foot steps of the master. Jesus' ministry focused on hurting people He never neglected anyone who was hurting. He healed them all. In fact it is Jesus who said that it is the sick that needs a physician. On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the health who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners (Matt. 9: 12-13)." That was after the self-righteous Pharisees had accused

him of sitting and eating with sinners. Likewise the church should understand that we are called to seek and save those that are lost. The church's ministry is that of healing and restoration. Jesus surrounded Himself with broken, bleeding, and unclean people.

It is the pastor's duty to convince people with past nasty experiences that regardless of past failures they must not give up. Even those with babies outside the wedlock should come to Jesus. In His earthly ministry Jesus encouraged all people struggling with sins and heavy burdens to come to him. It is said that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute. But Jesus was moved with compassion for her and He restored her dignity.

T.D. Jakes, (1993: 38) says that the church is the place where you can come broken and disgusted, and be healed, delivered and set free in the name of Jesus. The ministry of the Holy Spirit through the church is to call for the broken and hurting individuals, including single mothers to come to Jesus. He will heal and restore them. It is in the church that all people can hear the Good News and live. The church should give all people strength and nourishment. The church is to be the place where we share our burdens and allow others to help us with them. The Spirit calls all that are weary and heavy laden to come to Jesus, the physician of infinite ability; and they will find rest.

The Bible admonishes the church to minister to the widows and orphans. I believe God wants the church to minister to single mothers as well.

Paula White, (2004: 38) speaking about God's grace on Naomi and Ruth says: "Ruth – who was marred, scarred, stained, tainted, distorted, and warped by her early environment – lived out her life in greatness." She further says: "Naomi's experiences in Moab had left her hard, cynical and angry about the death of her husband and sons." But when God intervened, the situation changed completely. Paula also points out that "every time God desires to change a nation, he sends a person who has been changed." Naomi and Ruth had both gone through nasty experiences, but God's grace upon them was sufficient enough to change their destiny. I believe this is a very good example for the church, to give the disadvantaged ones another chance to experience the grace of God in the church by restoring them, and involving them in the service of the Lord.

It goes without saying that many Christians, including single mothers are hurting, suffering, and sin-filled. The church should realize that something is terribly wrong when Christians divorce at a rate that is higher than the secular world (Paula White, 2004).

This minister advises the church that God does not determine the promise of our future by looking at the condition of our past. God does not exclude anyone from his promises on account of their past mistakes. Immediately they come to the throne of mercy, and repent, God forgives them. And when God forgives, He forgets. The church needs to know that we are raised solely by the blood of Jesus. Some women live in self condemnation because they had had abortion, and others lived with two or more men, and had children outside the wedlock. These victims of fate need someone to teach them of the unfailing grace of God.

The church must also teach those who think they deserve God's favor to understand that no one is righteous enough before God to deserve His mercy. This includes those who have practiced charity for a long time, or those who have never cheated in any way. The church must know that God doesn't save us on account of our good deeds, but because of His grace. The grace of God was revealed to mankind through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. It was through the finished work of Calvary that we were redeemed and saved. This is vividly illustrated by Rahab's deliverance in Jericho (Josh. 2: 18-19).

The two spies gave Rahab assurance of salvation. Their acts of mercy illustrate that our salvation depends upon the glorious grace of God, not in our own good deeds (Rom. 4: 25; Eph. 2: 8-9). Her whole family was protected by the line of scarlet cord, a symbol of divine redemption, apart from which no one can be saved (Unger, 1981; Acts 4: 12).

By faith Rahab the harlot believed God and trusted His servants to deliver her and her family from destruction. She made up her mind to join the force of Israel and become one of them. She demonstrated this by her sincere faith which she displayed by saving the lives of the spies, and risking her own life (Unger, 1981).

Her petition merits justification because she requests protection from the people she had offered protection to. She was shown mercy not only in that she was protected, but

she obtained grace and got married to one of the spies, and consequently became a princess and featured among Jesus' ancestors (Unger, 1981).

Single mothers too, after their repentance must be restored by the church. The church must instruct these mothers in the word of God and guide them on how to live a new life. The word of God is full of instruction (Deut. 30: 15-16).

If the church gives support to single mothers and widows, it is not just being charitable to these under-privileged ones, but in a way the church is being thankful to God who is gracious to us and give us the privilege of having our spouses. Also, the church is obeying God. By supporting those who are hurting, the church is showing that we are aware of the fact that what happened to others, (their losses) might happen to us as well, and that we also will need support. This attitude is not alien to Christian character. God's grace is bestowed to all the people In order for the church to serve God's purpose, the church must learn to accommodate and accept all members with unconditional love. The Bible says that love covers many sins (1 Peter 4: 8). If we focus on others' pit falls and enjoy discriminating against them, then the love of God is not in us.

#### **5.5.5 Single mothers' involvement in the whole church program**

Women, both single and married, have impacted the church and improved its status in ways traditionally open to them. Women folk have featured in the church in different areas of operation, e.g. as missionaries serving in strange cultures and sometimes in geographically isolated settings. Some of them have served as faithful teachers in small churches, writing poems, stories, hymns, testimonies, etc. The church leadership should therefore remember that God has always honored the ministry undertaken by both married and unmarried women. It is true that through out ages God's blessing was inescapably evident on women's ministry, both married and single.

Today there is a great need for women's ministry. In some of the primitive societies, women and children can only be effectively reached by women. So if we expect married women only to participate in evangelism, the work will slow down, because the majority of women in the church today are single. If we could encourage women to participate in the ministry according to areas of their giftedness and calling, and not because of their

marital status; the church would become a haven of hope to all the people. The church is called upon to accommodate and encourage all the members and grant them equal opportunity for ministry.

I have observed that even though women have many differences that depend on economic and social structures, they share basic similarities, concerning family relationships and the raising of children. They are also aware of some challenges emanating from social and economic problems that affect people today. If women are granted equal opportunities irrespective of their marital status, they can bring about some positive influence, not only in the church, but also in the whole community.

In my opinion women, both married and unmarried need encouragement and support from both society and the church. The church should repent from looking at single mothers as slightly less than whole. If the church grants enough support to single mothers, they in turn will discover that they have unique opportunity to promote personal growth for attaining the tremendous feeling of importance and that they are self reliant and free. Because single mothers have the freedom to pursue friendships with a variety of people, male and female, both married and single, they can contribute a lot to church growth. I see single mothers as people with the privacy to relax, to listen to music, read or study and also as having ample opportunity to seek God. Therefore, the church is advised to accommodate the single mother in various projects where she can be very fruitful, because she has the freedom to spend time doing what she is assigned to do without anybody interfering. Because the single mother has the time, she can also bring to her work a deep sense of commitment and dedication.

The single mother can participate with much excellence in various church activities, such as music, mass choirs, intercession, and group prayer meetings. Most scholars agree strongly that single mothers retain a deep commitment to and ongoing relationships with other members of their families, and as such they can play a major role bringing the Good News to these individuals.

The widowed, separated or divorced mothers have many opportunities and advantages. They have unique challenges to meet because they must adjust to making decisions on their own to raise a family without a mate. The church is expected to provide strength

and support to these less privileged individuals. The church can afford to do this by affirming the validity of single mothers' efforts by making them feel welcome in the community and church activities, and by providing forums where they can discuss and share the social joys and problems they experience in their lives. Such support can help them acquire the necessary self confidence to be active and productive members of the church.

Since many single mothers are becoming more visible and more intimately engaged in their local communities, the church too, should involve them to minister to the needs of individuals in need of help. If well trained, single mothers can also organize professional associations for their sisters, and make more efforts to bring about some important changes in the political structures of our nation. The churches that are reluctant to restore and involve single mothers in the church activities must realize that the world is using all the human resources they have at hand.

The needs and concerns of single mothers with regard to their status and roles in the church should be given a serious consideration by both the church leadership and pastors. In stead of focusing much on their marital status, the church should rank single mothers in the church with regard to their talents, and ability. Strength of character and integrity should be prioritized. The church must recognize and value single mothers' lives and significance. Single mothers should be encouraged to become aware of their worth and dignity in their roles in the church so that they may learn to maximize their potential.

In my investigations I have already come across several instances where churches only consider couples for leadership positions despite a woman's maturity or leadership ability. This also affects women who were initially holding leadership positions in the church before the death of their spouses or divorce. This leads many single mothers to become invisible or indifferent.

The church has an obligation to follow the foot steps of the master. Jesus' ministry is a good example of encounters with different types of single women. In his earthly ministry Jesus modeled how to deal with vulnerable people. He demonstrated that single women also have value. We all know that Jesus came to bring beauty for ashes and to bind up

the broken hearted. So the church is called upon to reflect the heart of Christ to single mothers. The church should display the attitude that Christ had on single women. This is the attitude of compassion and kindness.

The church should minister to single mothers in a practical way that doesn't ignore their daily needs. Challenges that they face in life are real and practical, and need realistic and practical solutions. That's why they should be guided in ways where by they can be able to meet their daily needs without drifting away from Christian living. The church should commit itself to organizing various structures for projects and programs for skills development which will help train single mothers. In this way they will learn how to do practical jobs to meet their daily needs. This will also promote their confidence to feel valued, significant and wanted.

I suggest that this can be done effectively if single mothers don't work in isolation, but participate with married couples in order to build their confidence; and to promote fellowship.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

The importance of this chapter cannot be over emphasized. This chapter is very important because it reveals some remarkable suggestions based on the research made, that explains the situation as it should be in the Full Gospel Church Of God In South Africa, the case of district three in the Limpopo Province. As indicated above, this research was conducted at the sampled local churches in the Black communities. This chapter also highlights the theological aspects concerning single mothers.

The researcher has combined the suggestions of other scholars and those he personally interviewed, and justified them on the basis of the scriptures. He highlighted his findings in both the Bible and the early church. All these findings lead him to understand that the situation as it should be in the church today is that single mothers should be restored, loved, accepted, affirmed and encouraged to participate in the whole church program.



## **CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Conclusion**

This chapter serves to summarize and conclude this thesis. The researcher has taken much care to research and consult different sources and authorities while doing this project. It is out of love and concern for the well being of everybody in the church that this project was conducted. Further more, the researcher has tried his best to avoid any bias, both personal and from the sources consulted.

It has already been emphasized that the church should inspire all the members to learn to affirm single mothers in the church. The practical examples cited above will encourage the church leadership to restore and involve single mothers in the whole church program in the Full Gospel Church Of God In South Africa, in district three in the Limpopo Province; amongst the black communities.

Single mothers should be given a platform and be used within the church. It was also indicated that this challenge seems to be more conspicuous in the black community churches. I hope that this thesis will serve as an eye opener to the Full Gospel Church Of God's leadership and all church stake holders at district three of the Limpopo Province.

Black single mothers in particular will benefit a lot from this study because the church will show more concern to them. This will encourage them to come out and share their personal experiences with others. When single mothers realize that they are accepted and supported by the church, they will gain more confidence to face the challenges of life. Further more if the church will restore and encourage these mothers to participate fully in the whole church program, single mothers will try their best to live right because they will be proud of their church membership and will try their utmost best to preserve their positions in the local church.

## **6.2 Recommendation for further research**

I understand that the research made on this topic is not exhausted. Much more research can still be conducted. I believe that much information both in primary and secondary literature review, as well as personal interactions can still reveal more important data for the topic. Also, my research was confined to a specific area as indicated above; which means that if somebody else will widen the scope of the research on the same topic, he may come up with more valid information. So I encourage scholars to go ahead and make more intensive research on the same topic. I hope that the church community together with the academic community will benefit all the more through this research.

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Broadman

and

Holman

Publishers

## APPENDICES

### Permission to conduct research for a Master's Degree

P O Box 1150  
MALAMULELE  
0982  
15<sup>th</sup> November 2009

The District Overseer  
District 3 F G C  
P O Box 418  
MALAMULELE  
0982

Dear Sir

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FOR A MASTERS DEGREE: Myself

I am currently registered for the above-mentioned study course with Sats (South African Theological Seminary), and intend to engage myself in a research project to determine how pastors and the church leadership deal with single mothers in the local church with regard to involving them in the whole church program.

The title of my dissertation is as follows: "Restoring and involving single mothers in the whole church program in the Full Gospel Church of God in S A: A case study of district 3 in the Limpopo province.

I have identified the following local churches as participants for my study.

Malamulele Full Gospel Church of God

Makuleke Full Gospel Church of God

Makwarela Full Gospel Church of God

Musina Full Gospel Church of God



Patmos Revelation Centre (F G C)

Plange Full Gospel Church of God

I am fully aware of the fact that people's privacy and personal confidentiality must not be violated.

Attached please find the following:

- A copy of structured interview questions
- Suggested dates for conducting the research
- Interview schedule

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours faithfully

H.D Makhubele (pastor).

Table 3.8.1

Table 3.8.2

## **Permission to conduct research for a Master's degree: yourself**

District 3 F G C  
P O B0x 418  
MALAMULELE  
O982

Pastor H.D Makhubele  
Charis Miracle Centre  
P O Box 1150  
MALAMULELE  
0982

Dear Sir

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FOR A MASTERS DEGREE: YOURSELF

I hereby inform you that permission is granted you to conduct the research on the topic that you have indicated.

Also, you are hereby informed that the local church authorities of the sampled churches have no objection at all to your request.

Wishing you all the best

Yours faithfully

Pastor B.K. Makhubele (district overseer)

## Questions used for interviews

Table 3.8.1

1. What are the challenges faced by pastors with regard to accommodating single mothers in the full church program?
2. Are single mothers involved in the full church program?
3. Should single mothers take (occupy) leadership positions in the church?
4. What is the attitude of the church with regard to single mothers' full participation in the whole church program?
5. What does the Bible say (teach) concerning single mothers in the church?
6. What role should pastors play to influence the church to accommodate single mothers in the whole church program?
7. What support programs should be designed by the church to give support to single mothers on how to raise their fatherless children?
8. What does the constitution of the church say with regard to single mothers' participation in the whole church program?
9. What do married mothers say about the position of single mothers in the church?
10. What do single mothers themselves say with regard to their position and involvement in the church?
11. Do you (single mothers) think that you receive the same treatment (equality) as other (married) mothers in the church?
12. Does the church offer adequate support to single mothers and help on how to bring up their children?

## **A specimen of invitations**

ARE YOU SINGLE AND IN NEED OF SUPPORT?

COME AND JOIN OTHER SINGLE MOTHERS!

DATE:

VENUE:

TIME:

DON'T MISS!

## **Single mothers' retreat**

Single mothers and widows are hereby cordially invited to attend the empowerment workshop scheduled as follows:

DATE:

VENUE

TIME

**DON'T MISS!**

Table: 3.8.2: Mid-year population estimates by province, 2010-01-12

	Population estimates	Percentage share of the total population
Eastern Cape	6 743 800	13,5
Free State	2 824 500	5,7
Gauteng	11 191 700	22,4
Kwazulu-Natal	10 645 400	21,3
Limpopo	5 439 600	10,9
Mpumalanga	3 617 600	7,2
Northern Cape	1 103 900	2,2
North West	3 200 900	6,4
Western Cape	5 223 900	10,4

TOTAL                      49 991 300                      100,0

Table: 3.8.3 Births and deaths for the period 2001-2010

	Number of births	Total number of deaths	Total number of AIDS deaths	Percentage AIDS deaths
2001	1 142	526 052	198 030	37,6
2002	1 140	569 535	236 390	41,5
2003	1 136	609 562	271 488	44,5
2004	1 129	645 371	303 530	46,9
2005	1 121	661 664	314 196	47,5
2006	1 113	666 437	314 309	47,2
2007	1 101	662 969	306 154	46,2
2008	1 089	646 187	284 658	44,1
2009	1 078	637 301	270 107	42,1
2010	1 066	654 360	281 404	43,0

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Table: 3.8.4 Statistics South Africa

Family- South Africa by Province and Municipality: Individual monthly income.

For person weighted,DC34: Vhembe District Municipality, Female.

No income	481996
R1-R400	70725
R401-R800	80322
R801-R1600	8501
R1 601-R3 200	10185
R3 201-R6 400	7854
R6 401-R12 800	2261
R12 801-R25 600	291
R25 601-R51 200	105
R51 201-R102 400	296
R102 401-R204 800	190
R204801 or more	62

Created on Thursday, October 30, 2008

Statistics South Africa Web page: [www.statssa.gov.za](http://www.statssa.gov.za)

Statistics South Africa support: [info2statssa.gov.za](mailto:info2statssa.gov.za)

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Table: 3.8.5 Statistics South Africa

Family- South Africa by Province and Municipality, Female

No schooling	151659
Some primary	182870
Complete primary	41783
Some secondary	148609
Std 10 / Grade 12	46841
Higher	21835

Table: 3.8.6 Statistics South Africa by Province and Municipality

For person weighted, DC34: Vhembe DISTRICT Municipality, Female

Married traditional / customary	
Polygamous marriage	124954
Living together like married partners	-
Never married	396769
Widower (widow)	61737
Separated	12957
Divorced	10539

Table:3.8.7 Statistics South Africa

South Africa by Province and Municipality

Age group

For person weighted DC34: Vhembe District Municipality, Female

0-4	69233
5-9	84646
10-14	86911
15-19	79480
20-24	60764
25-29	50918
30-34	39722
35-39	37388
40-44	31327
45-49	24986
50-54	18548
55-59	12610
60;64	13367
65-69	16243

70-74	16068
75-79	7936
80-84	7719
85+	5066
Total	662829

Created on Thursday, October 30, 2008

Statistics South Africa Web page: [www.statssa.gov.za](http://www.statssa.gov.za)

Statistics South Africa support: [info2statssa.gov.za](mailto:info2statssa.gov.za)

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