

Pastoral Care Response to Involuntary Singleness among Christian Youth in Africa

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ABSTRACT

One of the challenges confronting the church in Africa at present is the issue of difficulty in getting settled maritally by the youth. This is a problem because marriage is a vital socio-cultural phenomenon that Africans rate highly. Inability to get married at the culturally expected time poses a great crisis to the youth concerned which the church cannot afford to ignore, particularly due to the communal nature of life in Africa. It is therefore, necessary for pastoral caregivers in Africa to utilize the functions of pastoral care to help the youth involved. These functions include healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling. It is strongly believed that life will become more bearable for the Christian youth in Africa if this approach to crisis intervention is used.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a social institution meant for the satisfaction of some social, psychological, physiological and religious needs. Some of such needs include sexual satisfaction, intimate relationship, childbearing/rearing and spiritual development. Before marriage is established to play the above role, selection of marriage partner comes first. Regrettably, it is not all who wish to get married that succeed at the intended time. A recent personal experience with grown up females of about 19 to 30 years of age making prayer requests in a camp for suitable suitors is an example. In the same camp, young males of about the same age range presented mate selection problems of unequal dimensions. From then, a universal problem on elongated singleness was sensed not

necessarily peculiar to African setting but almost general among races. Also In a study carried out by Danfulani Kore in six African countries (Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Ghana, Liberia and Nigeria), all the youths who responded to his questionnaire indicated their desire to get married one day.¹

Other empirical investigations have shown that there is rise in the age at which people get married. For instance, in a census carried out in the United States of America in year 2000, “the median age for marriage had increased from 23.3 to 26.7 for men and from 20.8 to 25 for women.”² In Sub-Saharan Africa (where Nigeria belongs), another report indicates that the percentage of women who married at the age of 20 years has dropped by at least 10 percent points in 9 out of the 21 countries sampled. In the case of some young men, they are considered more common in most parts of the world because they are expected to demonstrate ability to take care of a wife and family before getting married.³ Unfortunately, the economy is not favourable enough to allow them settle maritally from early to late twenties. Hence, some now remain single in their thirties and forties.

The wholistic nature of the shepherding ministry of the contemporary church however, would not leave the minds of pastoral caregivers unpricked if this plight of the youth is not properly tackled. Yet, it seems that only a few of such people with prolonged singleness are being given proper attention within the church. The problem may even be denied as a reality or its intensity played down by both the victims and relatives. But it is one of the existential crises “that can be denied

¹Danfulani Kore, *Prompting Healthy Marriage and Family Life* (Kaduaa: Baraka Press and Publishers Ltd., 2004), 4.

²Gary R. Collins, *Christian Counselling: A Comprehensive Guide*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Publishing Group, 1988), 65.

³http://www.inforforhealth.org/pr/j41/j41chap1_4.shtml, 20/11/2008.

temporarily but in time they must be faced realistically if life is to go on and be fulfilling.”⁴

For the purpose of clarity, *Involuntary Singleness* is used in this paper to mean crisis or problem of not having marriage partner at the desired or expected time in life by young persons. *Pastoral Care Response* here refers to application of the functions of pastoral care in helping the youth handle the challenge of inability to get married at the time they so wish. The paper will not examine the problem of singleness due to divorce or separation of couples. The paper will examine some of the causes and effects of such experience which constitute challenges to the contemporary church. The shepherding response of the church to the crisis will also be recommended.

CAUSES OF PROLONGED SINGLENESS

Prolonged singleness can be viewed from different causative factors which are socio-cultural, psychological, religious, educational and economic in nature. Some major causes are discussed below.

Socio-Cultural Factors

Akanmu⁵ discusses some causative factors for delay in getting married one of which is the role of women liberation movement. This movement expresses dissatisfaction with the dominance of men on the women folk. It sees marriage as one of the instruments being used to subject women to the perpetual control of men.⁶ To deliver women from the domination of men, the movement is discouraging women from being ‘entangled’ by marriage. “The activities of this movement has . . . also led

⁴Gary R. Collins, *Christian Counselling: A Comprehensive Guide*, revised edition (USA: W. Publishing Group, 1988), 65.

⁵S. O. Akanmu, *Sex, Singleness and Marriage: African Christian Perspective* (Lagos, Nigeria: Greater Heights Publication, 2003), 33-36.

⁶*Ibid.*

many women to take a personal choice of singlehood in order not to be under the dominance of men.”⁷

Some prefer to remain single due to terrible experiences that some couples go through in their marital relationship. For instance, some feel that it is more preferable to remain single and be wishing you were married than to be married and be wishing you were single. However, this view does not consider the fact that there are couples who enjoy being married to the point of wishing to be married in heaven if it could be possible. Again, some young people experience delay in getting married because they are tied down for long time caring for their aged parents. Such people are hindered from proper dating experience and interaction with the opposite sex who may propose to them in time.

Ogoje also gives some causes, a few of which are due to family responsibility. He cited an example of a young man with poor parents who could not sponsor him beyond secondary education as the first child of the family. Fortunately or unfortunately, he was still having four younger siblings after him. At the age of twenty-five, he was sent to learn a trade for a period of three or four years. On finishing the apprenticeship, his parents pushed the responsibilities of taking care of the younger ones to him. By this time, he was already thirty years of age and the care of the younger ones was in addition to that of his parents which could not be bargained.⁸ It becomes a big struggle for him to consider the need to have a wife. One of the reasons for the struggle has to do with how he would maintain his own nuclear family when it has not been easy to take care of the parents and siblings effectively.

⁷Akanmu, 33.

⁸Victor C. Ogoje, *Twenty-Three Mistakes Young Men Make That Cause Late Marriage and How It Affects Them and Upbringing of Their Children* (Lagos: Victex Publications, n.d.).

Furthermore, Oyinlola attaches the cause of delay in getting married to long courtship. He opines that it may lead to sin of fornication which could further lead to loss of interest in the relationship. In addition, Oyinlola feels that when courtship is too long there may be the temptation of severing the relationship even when God approves of the two marrying each other. In case the relationship is broken, "it may not be easy sometimes for the lady to be attached to another man on time possibly because of her age. It may lead to further disappointments because people begin to be suspicious of the lady, in most cases."⁹ At times period of singleness is prolonged when parents repeatedly reject the choice of partner made by their children.

Finally, the fact that it is forbidden in Africa for ladies to approach their male counterparts for marriage is a causative factor. Putting it in another way, a lady or her family does not initiate a move toward choosing a young man for marriage. Rather, no matter how convinced she is about a young man, she has to wait or show it in action so that the man would make the move. Any lady who is hasty in initiating the move, particularly verbally is considered a sociopathic. That means that the lady has broken the hedge of the norm that recognizes it as the right of a man to take such a step. Little wonder why some ladies keep on waiting when they could have approached some men they have interest in.

Psychological Factors

Self-concept may also prevent a person from getting marriage partner. Some ladies rate themselves as too good to marry most men. They continue to wait for the perfect ones to come thereby blocking available opportunities for choice making. Others are at the other extreme of inferiority complex. Such people go about the thought that they are not worthy to enjoy other persons' love and affection. The feeling

⁹ S. O. Oyinlola, *Marriage Gospel : Introduction to Proposal, Planning, Establishment and Management of a Peaceful and Settled Family* (Lagos: Foyin and Sons Nigeria Enterprises, 2003), 6.

makes them to withdraw from gatherings that may open opportunities for mate-selection.

Other psychological factors include indecision and shyness on the part of the young persons. Some of them find it difficult to decide on the right partner to choose among the available ones, thereby losing chances of getting married in time. Again, though apparently physiological, late maturation affects the possibility of getting marriage partner in time. For instance, some people get physically matured later thereby appearing younger than their age. The resultant effect of late maturing body is that the youth concerned have the likelihood of thinking that they are mature for marriage, thereby making no plan for getting engaged at the proper time corresponding with their real age.¹⁰

Also, family orientation is a psychological problem. Analogically, if an individual grew up within a dysfunctional family, there is the tendency for psychological development to be affected negatively. Such a young one may find it difficult to establish and maintain a lasting relationship with others as an adult. The background for this could be the type of structure developed while young with regard to courtship, marriage and home life.

Religious Factors

Spell or curse placement is a religious or spiritual factor for elongated singleness. In his personal testimony, Bolade also states that spell placement can hinder a person from getting someone to marry. As a former Islamic metaphysician, he narrates the story of his involvement in hindering a lady from getting a husband. According to Bolade, the spell was placed by burying the seal by the side of the grave of either a man or a woman – depending on the sex of the one intended to be afflicted. It is only when the person either succumbs to the wish of the afflictor and the spell is dug out or by the miraculous intervention of God that the victim would be set free. In the case of the lady being cited, she was in that

¹⁰Daniel O. Aleshire, *Understanding Today's Youth* (Nashville, Tennessee: Convention Press, 1982), 40.

condition for seven years after the Islamic metaphysician had become a Christian. He met the lady, interacted with her and he went to the graveyard to dig up and destroy the *teerah* (charm). After that, the lady got a husband and got three children.¹¹

Another point is holier than thou attitude exemplified in the case of a woman and her daughter who came to Famuyide for counselling. The daughter is the first child and she had no partner to marry at the age of thirty-three years. He states that:

The woman confessed that her daughter would have been married and settled long ago. But she was involved in one kind of . . . religious sect which made her [feel] holier than everybody including Christian brothers that proposed her for marriage. This is the fact and the cause of many sisters and brothers. They will eventually regret their holier than thou attitude after they had missed the will of God for their lives.¹²

Religious bias is believed to be capable of causing delay in getting married because some young people or their relations would not like marrying someone outside their local church or denomination.

Educational Factors

Famuyide, like others, mentions education as a possible cause. To him, pursuit of education at the expense of marriage when age is telling may cause delay.¹³ According to Spreitzer and Riley, “female scientists and engineers are six times as likely not to have married than their male

¹¹E. A Bolade, “My Turning Point,” *Christian Alive*, 1, September 2004, 11.

¹²E. S. Famuyide, *The Bible and the Christian Home* (Inalende, Ibadan: Folem Press, 1996), 37.

¹³Famuyide, 37.

counterparts.”¹⁴ The complexity associated with female higher educational actualization seems to put such ladies on ego-trip and thereby scare men away from them.

Economic Factors

Due to occupational and socio-economic reasons, there is selectivity in marriage market. For instance, because of fear of possible difficulty in control system, men tend to ignore women with strong will and independent personalities. On the part of the women who have reached a higher socio-economic level, it becomes difficult to marry any man below their level. This leads to extension of their period of singleness. Thereby posing challenges to the contemporary church¹⁵

The causes of prolonged singleness could be summarized thus: lack of interest at the right time, practice of prostitution in the past, being fearful about how to make correct choice and evil covenant and curses. Others include parental objection and demand, setting too high standard, inability to possess some necessities of life, and education. Moreover, mate choice could be delayed due to sickness and physical deformity, wrong indoctrination, poor family background and unfortunate courtship. Delay could be caused also by terrible sex experiences like rape, holier-than-thou attitude, being tied down for long in taking care of aged parents, and cultural prohibition that a lady should not approach a man for marriage. These points are believed to be capable of causing prolonged singleness.

EFFECTS OF PROLONGED SINGLENESS

¹⁴Elmer Sprentzer and Lawrence E. Riley, “Factors Associated with Singlehood,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 36, 3, August 1974, 536.

¹⁵Chukwudum Okolo, “The Church and Nigerian Women,” *African Ecclesial Review*, 27, 6, December 1985, 366.

The crisis of prolonged singleness would be discussed on the basis of prevalence and the effects it has on the youths involved which become challenges for the contemporary church. It has been rightly observed by McDowell and Hostetler that “the problem of choosing the right person’ to marry can occasion intense struggle . . . in a young man or woman’s mind.”¹⁶ Marriage-mate selection is also an important developmental experience that poses challenge to the young adults. It is generally viewed as a developmental crisis which calls for pastoral intervention in order to reduce the intensity of the crisis involved to the barest minimum

The fact, in the words of Wynn is that “a central feature of all human societies is an institution composed of a culturally accepted union of a man and a woman in husband-wife relationship as well as roles that recognize an order of sexual behaviour and legalize the function of parenthood.”¹⁷ In the case of ladies, they are considered in their parents’ homes in Africa in particular as nuisance who occupy spaces meant for others. At some points, they are also considered as ‘men’ in their paternal homes and are assigned properties like other men. Such a step may be anti-cultural but relations are forced to take it because of the ‘social clock’ which points them to the fact that it is getting too late for such ladies to still get husbands.¹⁸ The same view is expressed by Garry Collins when he states that “. . . people without partners can feel out of place, even in their own families.”¹⁹

Delay in marriage-mate selection is a crisis because it points to a blurred future for the affected people. Contrary to the promise of God in

¹⁶Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler, *Josh McDowell’s Handbook on Counselling Youth* (Nashville: W. Publishing Group, 1996),131.

¹⁷J. C. Wynn, ‘Marriage,’ *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counselling*, ed. by Rodney J. Hunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 676.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 466.

¹⁹Colins, *Christian Counselling*, 489.

Jeremiah 29:11 to give a future and a hope, the situation is an indication of the fact that expectation from and respect usually accorded married people may elude them. In other words, a lack of future partner at a mature age indicates uncertainty about some life aspirations like childbearing and posterity. When this occurs the young people passing through the experience, sooner or later become psychologically traumatized.²⁰

The initial issue that becomes manifested in the life of a traumatized person is crisis of faith. When discussing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Weaver notes that when an individual is stressed up and becomes traumatized, the experience is accompanied by crisis of faith. He explains further that, "With psychological trauma, an individual's sense of order and continuity in life is breached and shattered. Questions of meaning and purpose predominate as a person experiences the realization of the loss of control over one's destiny."²¹ The trauma is as a result of various psychological prickings on all sides which might include fear of the unknown, social, physical or mental disorders.

In their discussion on the effects of singleness, McDowell and Hostetler presents the following points to show that singleness it goes along with some crises. The duo believe that it can breed loneliness. This view was informed by the experience shared by their counselees who confessed that loneliness was one of the greatest struggles of their lives. The counselees are reported to have indicated that the more they advance in years the more they long for being connected with a person of the opposite sex for intimate relationship.²²

²⁰ Andrew J. Weaver, "Psychological Trauma: What Clergy Need to Know," *Pastoral Psychology*, 41, 6, 1993, 395.

²¹ Weaver, "Psychological Trauma: What Clergy Need to Know," *Pastoral Psychology*, 41, 6, 1993, 395.

²² McDowell and Hostetler, 141.

Delay in mate selection is a crisis due to the fact that serious conflicts develop between the mature youths who are not earning money and their parents upon whom they depend. The parents become bored after the pressure they put on their mature children does not yield the expected result. Parents may become unwilling to respond to the needs of the victims promptly as before. This is probably,

a tactical way of forcing him/her into the business of home making. Even where parents understand unless they are averagely good economically (sic), the ability to meet the needs of their grown up son or daughter may become a difficult matter. The effect of this is unhealthy relationship between the parents and their single wards where and when enough care is not taken.²³

When the affected young people find themselves in such a situation they are easily thrown off emotional balance.

Again, the victims may feel disappointed in their parents, yet no place to run to for succour. They would have loved to lean on their spouses but that is still an illusion. The next place they may think of is the church where pastoral care is expected to be rendered. Unfortunately, the care is either not forthcoming or not properly rendered, thereby increasing the intensity of the crisis. When this occurs, attitude or reaction to people and issues is mostly affected negatively and they find it difficult to believe that fellow human beings can do them any good. Hence, they develop distrust in people which results in poor interpersonal relationship thereby aggravating the crisis.

Both male and female young adults in this situation are affected because both are confronted with the question from relations on when they would bring the mate they have chosen. The pressure is even heavier

²³*Ibid.*

when friends and age mates as well as younger siblings are either married or are bringing their fiancé(e)s. The case of the female is worse because they find it difficult in African setting to approach a man for marriage even when they have interest in him. Rather, she would have to wait for him to indicate his interest. Thereby, she has to continue to wait, while pressure continues, to endure and persevere patiently as she swims through the ocean of singleness.²⁴

Furthermore, singleness is believed to be capable of creating sexual frustration and pressures. This, they say, does not mean that marriage precludes sexual frustration. However, lack of physical sexual fulfillment is a continuous struggle for many single individuals. Also, “single adults or youths who are not attached stand the risk of being open to sexual harassment more than those who are attached. People of weak character often demand for illicit relationship with single females.”²⁵ Some of the female youths may fall into the temptation thereby losing their virginity. A study in Africa on marriage and sexual experience among women of ages 15-19 years presents a heart-throbbing revelation. The study shows that 16% of women in that category as of 1990 are not married but have had sexual experiences.²⁶

This is worrisome because, with the increase in free-sex system being encouraged through audio-visual media, sex-related problem must have increased. This is a strong moral challenge staring the contemporary church on the face. The reason is that if that percentage of women at that age could be involved in sexual immorality (and with their male counterparts, of course) at the time on record, the situation could have grown worse now that prolonged singleness is an obvious experience.

²⁴Aworinde, *Help for the Singles: A Counsel for Meaningful Living*, 19.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 18

²⁶<http://www.inforhealth.org/por/j41figs.shtml>, 20/11/2008.

Sexual standards have changed and it seems more and more people are giving in to practice of sex before marriage.²⁷

The crisis is heightened when this occurs because self-esteem is affected. The youth concerned may also begin to doubt their own competence and value. This gradually begins to affect performance in activities and confidence to reach out for a love-relationship becomes a problem.²⁸

The youths who do not have stable future partners at the right time also receive psychological blow as their siblings pressurize them to get married on time. The affected persons go through psychological trauma as they feel that they are not meeting their siblings' expectations. These siblings, according to Aworinde

want to have a big sister whom they can travel to visit during holidays.

Instead of seeing you marrying, all they receive is the beating and rules

you give to them at home, consciously and unconsciously, they become insulting to you. The day you announce your wedding date to them, all the respect they have thrown away they will gather up for you again²⁹

In other words, the expectation of the younger ones continues to be unfulfilled as long as their elder brothers or sisters remain single.

Whether or not one gets a marriage partner, some 'marker events' serve as reminder that growth is taking place. Among the events are birth date celebration, renewal of driver's licence, career changes and changes

²⁷Collins, 3rd ed., 493.

²⁸Ibid., 494.

²⁹Aworinde, *Help for the Singles: A Counsel for Meaningful Living*, 20.

in social activities around. At a time the future is viewed as narrowing down, yet some earlier dreams are not realized. The focus now is not on the time spent but on the time left. Sullender views this experience in a theological term as “the clinical experience of eschatology – the awareness of the shortness of the present time.”³⁰ Unfortunately, keeping the pain to oneself seems to be the step taken by many of the affected persons. They put up defence mechanisms like denying the reality of the crisis or rationalizing it. Thereby they go through grieving process of anger, depression, despair, guilt feeling and anxiety.³¹ It is a crisis situation indeed because the situation is not simple but a complex one that makes the mind to be perplexed.

Consultation with different categories of ‘helpers’ take place because of this sickness of emotions.³² Normally, troubled people take the step of consulting with those whom they believe can offer some guidance towards solving their problems. Due to the critical nature of the experience, help is sought from cultural, religious and professional caregivers. In the African context, diviners, metaphysicians and cult members may be consulted for help. In the words of Peek,

throughout Africa whether in the city or in the country, no matter the religion, sex, or status of the individual, questions, problems, and choices arise for which everyday knowledge is insufficient and yet action must be taken. The information necessary to respond effectively is available, but often only through a diviner. That is why divination continues to provide a trusted means of decision making, a basic source of vital knowledge.”³³

³⁰Ibid., 43.

³¹Ibid., 14.

³²N. Abi-Hashem and H. N. Malony, “Inner Healing,” *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology and Counselling*, 1999, 822.

In other words, divination is one of the ways of knowing. Indeed, steps like these explain the fact that delay in marriage mate choice is a crisis. This being so, it calls for empathic pastoral intervention from the church to bring relief to the affected persons. Hence, pastoral response to the challenge of elongated singleness is presented below.

Shepherding Response of the Church to the Problem

The above crisis which the youth with prolonged singleness go through, calls for proper caring response from the church. This is necessary because it will help the youth involved to function properly in the church, at work and in the society at large. The church needs to assist the people to experience healing, sustain and guide them. These methods of care are explained further.

Healing Response

Healing has to do with the restoration of intra-personal as well as inter-personal wholeness. It is also used here to mean re-establishing broken relationships. The young people going through the crisis of delay in becoming married need caregivers who are skillful in healing their wounds. These are not physical wounds. According to Wiersbe, they are “deeper wounds of soul and spirit, mind and memory, emotion and conscience”³⁴ which should be carefully healed. It is necessary for the church to note that the people concerned are “troubled individuals presenting with life transitions, emotional or relational crises, or because of guilt, abuse, addictions, or low self-esteem.”³⁵ There is need for helpers

³³Philip M. Peek, “The Study of Divination, Present and Past,” *African Divination systems: Ways fo Knowing*, edited by Philip M. Peek (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 1-2.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Len Sperry, “Integrating Spiritual Direction Functions in the Practice of Psychotherapy,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 31, 1, 2003, 5.

of the single young people to help in ensuring at least inner reconciliation between the youth who has experienced separation with their former suitors. Reconciliation with God also is necessary for emotional and spiritual healing to be in place. The crisis-ridden developmental phase, as in the case of the affected youth, calls for pastoral care and counselling that is made up of “religious and spiritual resources as well as psychological understanding for healing and growth.”³⁶ The care giving church should possess positive attitude towards single members.³⁷ This has to be so if symptom relief, problem solution and restoration of psychological health will be achieved.

One of the spiritual resources that would be used to effect healing is prayer and deliverance ministration. The church as a spritua organization needs to utilize prayer in helping the youths with prolonged singleness because the youths anticipate it. An evidence of the desire for prayer by Christian clients is indicated in a study. It is thereby shown that 82% of subjects of the research desired audible prayer in counselling and also expected that counsellors would be praying for them outside the session.³⁸ This is a helpful resource when the cause of the crisis is understood to be mysterious or having demonic undertone as in the African context. The yoke will have to be broken before true healing would take place. For instance, some young people have gone so deep into a relationship in such a way that oaths have been taken. Some have even made blood covenants. By the time the relationship breaks, the duo may not consider the covenant as valid again. Unfortunately, since life is in the blood, the cord of relationship continues to bind them in the spiritual realm which affects other relationships or efforts towards establishing one in the negative.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Collins, 3rd ed., 496.

³⁸Chat Weld, “Christian Clients’ Preferences Regarding Prayer as a Counseling Intervention,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 35, 4, 2007, 328.

The youth concerned can be healed of the negative effect of the covenant through prayer of deliverance.

The caregiver, if well equipped for it, may handle the deliverance. Others gifted in the ministry may be involved using the Word of God and the power in the name and blood of Jesus Christ. This weapon is believed to be potent enough to break such a yoke. It should not be ignored if permanent healing will be in place.³⁹

Sustaining Response

As appropriate as it is for the church to assist the youths concerned to attain intrapersonal, interpersonal and divine and human congruence, that is not all that should be done. After healing has been achieved in any or all of these dimensions, it should be realized that the initial need has not been met. In other words, the problem that resulted into crisis is still present with the youth concerned. They are still desiring marriage partners without which there may be problem of instability in life. That is, the affected persons need to be sustained while they are waiting for the day that their status will change from never married singles to married couples.

The experience is personal; therefore, the youth should be helped to accept their condition through empathic listening of their feelings and interaction so as not to become depressed⁴⁰. While they are still waiting for the answer to their long existing question “Marriage: When will it be?”⁴¹, they need to occupy their time with some important things rather than wasting their time worrying about when they will meet their future spouse. Pastoral care givers need to organize viable singles fellowships in

³⁹Adeyinka Togun, *Break Your Family Curses and Live in Christian Liberty* (Ibadan: Lynxtof Ventures, 2003), 65, 83.

⁴⁰Collins, 3rd ed., 496.

⁴¹Sunday Umahi, “Unmarried Ladies at Thirty,” *Weekend Concord*, Saturday, September 29, 1990, 3.

the church. Borrowing from Akanmu, there should be fellowships separately put in place for the never married singles, the divorced the separated and the widows.⁴²

The youths concerned should be encouraged to mix with responsible persons in social gatherings. Taking time to visit amusement parks, zoos and some other recreational centres for sight-seeing that affords opportunity for social interaction will not only while time away, it will also make the experience less-burdensome. Such an outing should be organized with singles with whom the affected youth can bare their minds. As Africans, visitation to understanding friends and relations will discongest the minds of unhealthy thinking that may be injurious to the person's emotional well-being. They should also be encouraged to believe in God truly because it will strengthen their minds in times of distress.⁴³

Furthermore, sustaining the youth in such conditions can also be achieved through utilization of counselling groups and fellowships that are relevant to their needs. Some of the fellowships may be unisexual while others bisexual. The main issue is that the group should fulfill the purpose of sustaining the affected youths

Not that alone, fellowshipping with people of similar background can be a training ground for proper expression of feelings. Members in such a counselling group are to learn how to have proper perception of others and God. They are also to be exposed to the need to take responsibility for their lives in spite of the support and guiding that others may offer. This is to help them to take necessary risks that will benefit them while waiting to get a spouse or even when married. Again, group counselling is to create the spirit of interdependency as each member

⁴²S. O. Akanmu, *Sex, Singleness and Marriage*.

⁴³Dupe Olufemi-Kayode, "Even Things You Can Do While 'Waiting,'" *The Punch*, Thursday, August 17, 2000, 36.

develops trust in majority if not all, of the members of the group.⁴⁴ The same feeling is most likely going to be developed towards other people thereby helping in future marriage-mate selection process.

The above objectives of group counselling being so, pastoral caregivers need to use it for sustaining the youths who are painfully waiting for their turn to get settled maritally. One of the reasons calling for such a method is that the place of relationships is crucial in the development of personality. This implies that isolation is one of the problems that mature youths who do not have marriage partners at the time they so desire are facing. The group counselling will help in reversing the process, thereby preparing the people concerned to proceed into other relationship experiences. Therefore, the pastoral caregivers should not work on the assumption that people will not want to open up in the presence of a few others. This will not be a generalized view because experience in some counselling centres is in contrast to that. For instance, Drakeford has cited a counselling centre practicing one-to-one counselling method before changing to group system. It was later found out that people are more willing to bear their minds in a group than a one-to-one system. It was also observed that women, in particular, are more open to share intimate and private issues with more ease than when in a one-to-one counselling session.⁴⁵

Guiding Response

The Christian journey requires guidance from God to make life what it ought to be. Unfortunately guidance is not always given or taken at the appropriate time or from the appropriate source. The church can guide by making provision for avenues like Singles' Fellowship, excursions, retreats, seminars, symposia and conferences where youths can interact among themselves. In the process of choice making, the church could

⁴⁴Ibid., 44-45.

⁴⁵Ibid., 46.

explore the possibility of match making particularly with the shy ones at least to introduce them to one another to consider possibility of marriage. This could be handled through a functional marriage committee under the supervision of the church pastor.

When steps are being taken towards mate selection, caregivers have to guide the youth in applying the Word of God and the stand of the church in the new contexts. This is possible because God continues to guide his children in times of needs, choice-making inclusive. The primary way through which God guides his children is by studying his Word on daily basis. Principles that will guide the believers in making the right decisions are enshrined in the Bible. Hence Bible study in the church should always take note of practical application to make it relevant to life situations.

Further still, the issue of dream as a means by which God guides his children should be properly articulated by the church. The reason is that youths, like other members, will dream and make attempts towards understanding what God is saying. The youths need to be guided in the area of analyzing and interpreting dreams especially when it has to do with decisions on a lasting relationship like marriage.⁴⁶

In the opinion of Adediran, there are some indicators of true love that pastoral caregivers and counsellors may use in guiding the youth through the process of mate selection. They are to be guided to ascertain whether or not they feel greatly happy while in the presence of the other person than in the presence of others. The fact that a lady or a young man feels happier when the proposed fiancé is around may be an indication of the right choice. Another indicator is a feeling of lack of rest and satisfaction when the other person is away. The counsellor would have to ask the young people concerned, how they feel when they are separated from the proposed person for some length of time. Feeling anxious to see

⁴⁶Sade Akanni, "Some Crucial Bedrocks," *Living Seed*, 9, 1, February 2002, 14.

again, having the urge to make contact through phone or letter whenever one is away from the other is a positive sign.⁴⁷

The church should guide the single people in the area of interpersonal relationships. In times of feelings of insecurity in a relationship, they should be encouraged to discourse openly and objectively to clarify each other's intentions. Friendship should be encouraged while in a love-relation where willingness to share experiences and feelings, mutual acceptance, respect and readiness to assist each other are possible.

The youths should also be guided in the aspect of preparation for marriage. They should be made to note that waiting for a time when all will be well in the area of personal car, house or attainment of higher degree may not be necessary after a partner has been properly selected and both persons involved are of age.

CONCLUSION

One can safely conclude based on the above evidences that, prolonged singleness is a problem which the contemporary church faces. The problem affects the individuals, their relations, the church and the society at large. Hence, the church needs to respond to the plight of both male and female young persons in the church who are affected with a view to helping them out of the predicament. Practical programmes that will be of assistance to these ones should be put in place. Resource persons with relevant experience or exposure should be utilized in such programmes. This will be possible when the church makes use of the basic functions of pastoral care which include healing, sustaining and guiding appropriately.

⁴⁷Oluwafemi Sunday Adediran, "Courtship and Dating," *The Bread of Life*, 2, 2002, 6-7.

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