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and demands to holistically nurture their physical, psychological, social and spiritual dimensions of growth (Genz & Kjsebo, 2010). While all these dimensions are critical, this paper focuses on the nurturing of children's spiritual development by their Christian mothers. This is imperative since children are spiritual beings (Miller, 2015) and they require spiritual nurture to become responsible Christians, prepared to live up to Christian standards and faith as they grow. Jesus takes children seriously, they have a special place in his kingdom (Stonehouse, 2006), hence, the need for spiritual nurture and development. It is with this understanding that the paper sought to explore the place of Christian mothers in enriching spiritual growth of their children in a world least concerned about spiritual development. The objectives of this study were to; investigate the role of Christian mothers in cultivating Christian values in their children's lives, examine the approaches Christian mothers use in enhancing spiritual development of their children and proffer strategies that Christian mothers could utilize to promote spiritual development of their children. This study was informed by James Fowler's theory of faith development (1981). The study adopted desk top research methodology. The findings of this study revealed that while the responsibility to nurture the spiritual development of children is a corporate responsibility in the Christian faith, it is highly influenced by mothers.

1.0 Introduction

Spiritual dimension is an important facet of human life. It represents a critical dimension of holistic human development besides; physical, social and emotional. This notwithstanding, spirituality is often overlooked in scholarship since, only less than two-thirds of one percent of researches done on child development focus on spirituality and its influence on holistic child development (Volling, Mahoney & Rauer, 2009). Scholarly accounts by (Barret, 2004; Hinde, 2010) emphasize the 'naturalness' of religion by arguing that human minds are pre-disposed to respond religiously in the ways people think, relate with each other and act. Equally important is the role of nurture in shaping children's spirituality. Nature

build brains of children and make them pre-disposed to learn while nurture, through acceptable socialization processes, enhance the development of children's value systems that contribute to their spiritual growth (Pehr & Nkara, 2017).

Further, (Gunnoe, Hetherington & Reiss, 1999) observe that there exists an association between parental religiosity, parenting and spiritual development of children. It is within the family that children are spiritually nurtured. Parents play an important role in the formative stages on children's lives. They instill values that inform children's beliefs and expected behaviour as they go through their developmental stages of life. Therefore, Christian parents are expected to nurture their

Abstract

Children are a blessing from God and a source of new life and hope for continuity in the community as documented by Mbiti (1969) that "children are buds of society, and every birth is the arrival of 'spring' when life shoots out and the community thrives." This implies children are a blessing to behold by parents as well as the larger community. Their arrival brings joy, jubilation and celebrations (Kiarie, 2016) as they are ushered in to be part and parcel of the larger community. However, children come with enormous responsibilities

children to develop values that give emphasis to Christ-like character such as; compassion, empathy, love, kindness, care and moral responsibility among others as expected in biblical teachings (Proverbs 22:6) that require parents to train their children in the ways they should go. Hence, parental influence in moral and spiritual development of children is a sacred and God given responsibility (Volling, Kolak & Kennedy, 2009). Through parental responsibility, Christian mother have an opportunity and privilege to influence their children with regard to their spiritual growth and development.

2.0 Problem Statement

From the foregoing it is undisputable that though children are pre-disposed to be spiritual, parental nurture to enhance children's spiritual growth is of paramount importance (Volling, Kolak & Kennedy, 2009). Fathers and mothers have a role to nurture and influence spiritual development of their children since the family is the first community of faith that children find themselves in and has a powerful influence on the development of children's faith. Parents are the first educators of children in spiritual matters. When parents talk about God and practice godly virtues, they influence their children's spirituality (Roberto, 2007). Parents who value and appreciate spirituality are likely to raise children who value spirituality as well and the reverse is true (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2005). Hence, there is a relationship between parental spirituality and their children's spirituality, faith and practice.

However, families have undergone significant changes in the past few decades that have altered parenting styles due to stress associated with modern lifestyles. Quality family time and shared family activities through which children's spirituality could be nurtured by parents have become minimal. There is steady decline of common family religious practices through which spirituality is nurtured. Most parents feel ill-equipped as primary spiritual nurturers of children and worst still, parents are hardly available for their children due to work related commitments that keep them away from home for long hours. This notwithstanding, mothers are still perceived to be emotionally connected and closer to their children, it is assumed that they take more time raising and nurturing their children while meeting their all-rounded needs on more regular routines than men do. Ultimately, it is hoped that all these activities undertaken by mothers go a long way to influence children's development and ability to cope with dynamic physical, social-cultural and psychological demands of present and future lives. Therefore, spiritual nurture of children is an important dimension of children's growth because

all children are spiritual. However, in contemporary societies, little emphasis is given to it by most parents as compared to other developmental dimensions. Likewise, not much scholarly research has been done in this field. It is with this understanding that this study sought to investigate the role of Christian mothers in influencing spiritual development of children to promote holistic development.

3.0 Objectives of the Study

This study was guided by the following objectives that sought to;

- 3.1 Investigate the role of Christian mothers in nurturing Christian values in their children.
- 3.2 Establish approaches Christian mothers use to enhance spiritual development of children.
- 3.3 Proffer strategies that Christian mothers could utilize to promote spiritual development of their children.

4.0 Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study was informed by James Fowler's faith development theory (FFD), (1981). Fowler, proposed six stages of faith or spiritual development across the life span. According to FFD theory, faith is perceived as a holistic orientation concerned with individual relatedness to the universe. The theory observes that at stage zero, which is from birth to two years of a child's life, faith is primal or undifferentiated. During this stage, children concentrate on their safety, warmth and security of their environment. It is at this stage that foundations of faith are laid by parents and other primary care-givers. If consistent nurturance is maintained, children develop feelings of trust and safety about the world in which they live. Pre-images of God are reflected in the reassuring interaction of care-giver (Fowler, 1981). Any experiences contrary to this lead to distrust. At this stage, Christian parents, especially mothers are key in fostering warm relationships of trust and safety with their children. If children learn to trust parents, more especially their mothers, they feel secure and develop relationships of trust. This is linked to children's later ability to successfully adapt and form meaningful relationships with people and God even at later stages of their growth and development (Fowler, 1981).

The first stage of FFD, the children are between 3-5 years. It is about intuitive-projective of faith and children's psyches are unprotected from exposure to the unconscious intuitive images of good and bad and moral and evil. The world of children is painted

with fantasy and their thinking and actions are spontaneous, episodic and without any given pattern. Parental influence of spirituality is critical at this stage. Since mothers are the closest family members in the lives of children, and most often than not available for their children, their role to nurture children at this stage is critical (Ashley, 1991). Hence, their influence in their children's spirituality development is significant as their imagination of God is reinforced through parental presence, warmth and love. Children imagine God as loving, kind and good enough to trust just like they do to their parents. In some cases, the opposite is true.

In the second stage, which is between 6-12 years of age, children are in school and believe in justice and reciprocity. Their reasoning skills are developing; hence they are able to organize their thoughts and experiences and distinguish between fiction and reality. Most children at this stage, literally interpret Christian stories and they perceive God as a parent in their lives. At this stage, it is critical for parents to help their children to perceive God positively. Since parents are representatives of God, and in the place of God in their children's lives, they need to depict God as loving, kind and caring (Kiarie, 2006).

In stage three, which falls between 11-18 years, during adolescence period, the children go through a synthetic-conventional faith. At this is stage, children are able to think in reflective ways leading to conformity to specific groups of significant others. They synthesize and integrate values held by those significant others as a basis of their own values (Fowler & Osmer 1985). In the fourth stage, which is between 19 years to the mid of late thirties, people engage in individuating-reflection. They take responsibility and full control of their own feelings and actions as well as their religious beliefs and spirituality. They disengage from groups they were formally affiliated to. They employ critical and analytical thinking to evaluate and justify their beliefs (Fowler & Osmer, 1985). At this stage in life, they have the capacity to discern and judge for themselves what is true.

Stage five is the conjunctive faith phase that occurs during the mid-life crisis (Flower, 1981). At this age, people have concurrence faith and appreciate religious inconsistencies. They accommodate and appreciate religious interpretations of other people while they uphold their inherited beliefs, values and systems. They become more open and accommodative to contradictory and opposing worldviews while they commit themselves to their own worldviews. They develop and embrace multi-dimensional understanding of faith (Fowler, 1981). The sixth stage is the universalizing faith phase characterized by old people who have relinquished

and transcended 'self'. They are open-minded and widen their horizons in the search for the truth (Astley, 1991). They transcend personal belief systems however much they cherish them to achieve a sense of oneness with fellow human beings with diverse beliefs (Fowler, 1984). Conflicting beliefs are accommodated and not considered as absurdities or impossibilities, but normal occurrences in a diverse world (Fowler, 1984). Even at this stage, the values that were established in their lives as children still linger on. They significantly guide and concretize their spirituality as observed by (Bandura, 1971) and (Proverbs 22:6).

5.0 Methodology of the Study

The study used desktop research method to unravel the influence of Christian mothers in nurturing spiritual development of children. Comprehensive literature search was conducted using keywords such as; role of Christian mothers, nurturing, spiritual development, children to gather information for this paper. Synonyms of each key word were also used to search for and consider relevant studies done in this field. Literature search was limited to the articles published in the English-language books, journals and scientific electronic materials.

6.0 Findings of the Study

The finding of the study was presented in tandem with the objectives of this study which were to; investigate the role of Christian mothers in nurturing Christian values in their children, establish approaches Christian mothers use to enhancing spiritual development of their children and proffer strategies that Christian mothers could utilize to promote spiritual development of their children. They are discussed in details in the sub-sequent sections.

6.1 Role of Christian mothers in nurturing Christian values in their children

First before one identifies the role of motherhood, it is important to acknowledge that being a mother is a God-given privilege and blessing which comes with sacred responsibilities as echoed in (Genesis 4:1) when Eve states that "I have gotten a man from the Lord" upon giving birth to his son Cain. The role of motherhood comes with joy (John 16:21) as the mother forgets her labour pains as soon as the child is delivered and is overwhelmed by the realization that a man is born through her into the world. These sentiments are confirmed by Mbiti (1969) who remarks that "children are buds of society, and every birth is the arrival of 'spring' when life shoots out and the community thrives." This implies that

children are a blessing to behold for parents as well as the larger community. The Bible (Psalms 127:3) confirms this by stating that “children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is its reward.” Their arrival brings joy, jubilations and celebrations (Kiarie, 2016) as they are ushered in to be part and parcel of the larger community. However, children come with enormous responsibilities and demands to holistically nurture them physically, psychologically, socially and spiritually (Genz & Kjsebo, 2010).

The role of Christian mothers is multifaceted as can be depicted from biblical examples. God specifically created Eve (women) to physically conceive and bear children (Genesis 3:16) and endowed women with emotional predisposition to enable them easily connect with their children, facilitate their nurturance process as documented in the bible (Titus 2:4) that, mothers are to ... love their children, be discrete, chaste, keepers at home...that the work of God may not be blasphemed.

There are examples of Godly mothers in the bible. For instance, in the old Testament, Hannah, the mother of Samuel stands out as a model religious mother. Before conception, she promised to dedicate her son Samuel to God (I Samuel 1:11). Therefore, the role of Christian mothers is to put God first and seek to dedicate the lives of their children for the service of the Lord. Consequently, godly mothers should teach their children to be committed and obedient to God and live to serve Him and humanity in their childhood as well as adulthood. Christian mothers should take advantage of children’s formative years to train and inculcate into them lifelong Christian values as observed in (Proverbs 22:6) and Bandura (1971) when they give emphasis to the impact the training of children has on their later lives.

Persons who are spiritually grounded in their formative years are apt to make right decisions about their life-values, faith and spirituality and all these affect their behaviour throughout their lives. Thus, the role of Christian mothers executed to children in their formative years is manifested not only in childhood but adulthood as well. The virtues earlier inculcated by mothers in childhood are applied in adulthood as people make appropriate personal choices regarding their spiritual lives and commitment to the Lord (White, 1998). This is why mothers are very instrumental in doing this role as exemplified by Hannah, the mother of Samuel.

Another example of the role of Christian motherhood is exemplified by Mary, the mother of Jesus. It is estimated that Jesus spent 90% of his life with his mother Mary (White, 1988), that is, from his conception to the start of his public ministry

(John 2:1-2; John 4:17-18). As Mary raised Jesus, she adhered to the Law of Moses and took Jesus for dedication (John 2:22-24). She also observed regular pilgrimages to Jerusalem for Passover feasts (Luke 2:41-43). Though Jesus did not attend rabbinical schools, he had great understanding of the word of God because her mother taught Jesus scriptures (White, 1988). Further, White (1988), records that as a child, Jesus studied Scriptures daily at His mother’s lap. Mary, the mother of Jesus, faithfully taught his son from the scrolls of the prophets. Mary impressed scriptures on Jesus as required of God in (Deuteronomy 6:7) which urges parents to talk about them when they sit at home, walk along the road, lie down and get up. That which Jesus was taught by Mary influenced his spiritual development (Luke 2:52). Christian mothers can model after Mary, the mother of Jesus to facilitate holistic spiritual development of their children. Once this is effectively done, firm spiritual foundations are laid and they will make the person remain firm in their faith for the rest of their lives, as was the case of Jesus.

Similarly, the example of Eunice and Loise, the mother and grandmother of Timothy had tremendous influence in his life (II Timothy 1:5). It is recorded that his faith was established through his grandmother Loise and mother Eunice. Though Paul contributed to the conversion and spiritual maturity of Timothy, before Paul came into Timothy’s life, he was influenced by these two godly women right from his childhood (II Timothy 3:14-17). Thus, exercising faith in God and honouring His word, Christian mothers, committed to Christian parenting, can have great influence in the holistic development of their children through Christian training and modelling.

6.2 Approaches Christian Mothers use to Enhance Spiritual Development of Children

The study used social learning theory as a springboard on which approaches used by Christian mothers to enhance spiritual development of their children is hitched (Bandura, 1971). In his theory of social learning, Bandura (1971) observes that children learn through observation and imitation of what their forebears say and do. Additionally, children learn through positive or negative reinforcement. For the Christian mothers to train their children spiritually in a sustainable manner, the mothers themselves must be spiritually mature and sincere in their faith (Luke 1: 27-3; II Timothy 1:5) as was the case with Hannah, the mother of Samuel, Mary, the mother of Jesus and Loise and Eunice the grandmother and mother of Timothy. These

women's faith pre-dated their children's faith. They deliberately sought to hand over their faith to their children because genuine faith is contagious. These children saw God in their mothers, were attracted to this God and they pursued after Him. These exemplary biblical mothers modelled God in their lives. The children observed and imitated the beliefs and practices of their mothers.

Secondly, godly mothers honour God's word and train their children to observe it (II Timothy 3:14-17). As earlier alluded, parents are primary teachers of children. They are the ones who introduce the word of God to children. Later on, other spiritual mentors, such as Paul in the case of Timothy, may come in, but the initial foundation must be laid by parents, especially mothers, whose role is of paramount importance. Therefore, the best thing Christian mothers can do for their children is to inculcate in them the desire to treasure the word of God, right from their early ages.

Thirdly, Christian mothers must desire to grow their own love for Christ. Mothers cannot give what they do not have. The motivation for children to develop spiritually, partly comes from the observations children make about their parents' passion and love for God. Children must see evidence of Mothers' love for God and His word (Bandura, 1971) exemplified through regular reading of the bible, consistent prayer life and living the Christian talk as they lead their children to the Lord (White, 1988). Children need to be nurtured to know that God is love, holy, just, and seeks obedience from his people. Disobedience and rebelliousness towards God brings eternal punishment. Children need to understand that Jesus died on the cross as our substitute (Galatians 3:13). They also need to know that God forgives sins out of his kindness and mercy (I John 2:2). As Christian mothers train their children in God's word, they need to know that every person is accountable before God (II Corinthians 5:10; Jeremiah 31:30 & Ezekiel 18:20). Ensuing from these discourse, the crucial task of Christian mothers is to pray for, train and lead their children to Christ using scriptures and their own lifestyles.

Fourthly, Christian Mothers must train their children on how to live according to the word of God that separates right from wrong in relation to the greatest commandment (Mark 12: 30-31) that requires Christians to love God and well as man. Children need to see their mothers applying this commandment while teaching them to apply it in their own lives. Finally, Christian mothers have great influence on their children as evidenced in the lifelong influence of Loise and Eunice in the life of Timothy. Christian faith is shaped within families,

especially by godly mothers. Therefore, Christian mothers must do their part by rearing and training their children to be responsible men and women before God and man in their generation, community and nation. The role of Christian motherhood is much greater than that of successful statemen, businessmen, artists or scientist in our modern societies (Landry, 2014).

The approaches discussed above could be simplified by Christian mothers' making themselves; available for their children (Deuteronomy 6:6-7), being involved with their children (Ephesians 6:4) and being ready to teach them (Psalms 78:5-6; Deuteronomy 4:10 & Ephesians 6:4). Similarly, Christian mothers must be ready to train their children to develop skills and discover their inner strengths (Proverbs 22:6) and their spiritual gifts (Romans 12:3-8; I Corinthians 12). Christian mothers also need to discipline their children to develop the fear of the Lord by consistently, living and firmly drawing the line between right and wrong (Proverbs 13:24; Proverbs 19:18 & Hebrew 12:5-11). They must nurture their children by providing to them with supportive environment, where they are allowed to be children, can fail, but still be embraced and accepted, and be unconditionally loved (Titus 2:4; II Timothy 1:7; Ephesians 4: 29-32). Finally, Christian mothers need to model integrity by living Christ-like lives that children can observe and imitate (Deuteronomy 4:9, 15, 23; Proverbs 10: 9; 11:3; Psalms 37:18,37). Therefore, mothers have unique, on-going and unending responsibilities to nurture their children through progressive life stages as; toddlers, adolescents, teenagers, young adults, or even as adults with children of their own. Though motherhood roles may develop and change through these stages, their love, care, nurture and encouragement should never cease.

6.3 Strategies Christian mothers utilize to promote spiritual development of children

Most mothers feel inadequate or ill-prepared to lay firm spiritual foundation in the lives of their children. This is because, they themselves were not well trained in spiritual matters and they are not spiritually grounded. In some cases, parents are too busy and unavailable to perform this sacred responsibility. This notwithstanding, Christian mothers should try and find out which strategies work for them as they endeavour to promote spiritual growth of their children to enable them know, love and trust in God. These should be deliberate and well calculated strategies that Christian mothers must invest quality time and

reasonable amount of resources to acquire. Some of the strategies that could be adopted are;

- 6.3.1 Modelling Christ-** Christian mothers should make spiritual beliefs and practices part of their daily routines. In so doing, they lay firm spiritual foundation for children right from the cradle. When mothers trust and dependence in God, children in turn learn to trust and depend on their 'God-like' mothers and respond to their love and care. This is because children first view God through their parents' example. They develop unconditional love and acceptance of parents and significant others which later forms the basis of trust in God, the heavenly father. Hence, modeling Christ to children is a critical way of promoting children's spiritual development.
- 6.3.2 Developing open and free communication** - Christian mothers must encourage open and free communication with their children. Most children will ask many spiritual questions. Mothers must be sensitive to these questions, truthfully answer them according to children's ages while correcting misconceptions without criticizing or blaming them. Let the children know that their mothers do not have answers to all questions they ask.
- 6.3.3 Helping children to have positive concepts of God** – Mothers should help children to know that God is loving, caring, trustworthy, forgiving and concerned with their lives. This will help them develop the right attitude about God and ultimately influence their spiritual connections with God. Christian mothers can reflect these attitudes in children's lives. Children need to perceive God as a loving "father" full of positive attributes. Anything contrary to this, portrays God as unattractive to children which eventually works against their spiritual development.
- 6.3.4 Use of biblical heroic stories-** Christian mothers should tell children stories of biblical heroes from the old and new testaments, life and deeds of Jesus. They need to help children, of course, those who can, to memorize scriptures. The words of these scriptures will be treasures written and hidden in children's hearts for the rest of their lives. Songs could be used

for those children who cannot memorize scriptures. Songs learned in childhood have a huge impact since they are not easily forgotten even in later adulthood years.

- 6.3.5 Prayer** – Mothers could use prayers to draw children to God. Prayer is powerful in strengthening children's relationship with God. Teaching children to pray by adoring God, asking for forgiveness, giving thanks for God's blessings, petitioning God with their needs and those of others in humble supplications (ACTS) is important for spiritual nurture.
- 6.3.6 Give children bible presents-** Presenting children with bible presents appropriate for their ages, especially during their birthdays is important. For young children, the bibles should be pictorial to create an entertaining environment full of exploration, questioning and healthy conversation. Establish routine prayer time such as bedtime story telling and prayer. It is important to mention each child's name in prayers so that children know that they are individually important to you as a mother and to God.
- 6.3.7 Help children to associate God with their daily lives and nature** through the stories of creation, exploring and appreciating the beauty and wonders of God's creation. This practice will help children easily connect with God.
- 6.3.8 Participation in family and church worship** - Christian mothers should teach their children to lead family worship in turns. Appreciate the simplicity and genuineness of their worship and prayers. Do not show that the child did not do well by re-doing what they have already done as this demoralizes them.
- 6.3.9 Provide opportunities for age appropriate structured religious training and service** for children in church, camps, retreats and service to those in need in the community
- 6.3.10 Christian mothers should discipline your children.** Mothers should not use their fathers as a scare and discipling agent. Discipline children promptly and in a timely manner without waiting for their fathers. This stamps authority of mothers, which children grow to appreciate and respect. Remember it is

biblical to discipline children. Punishment may not be pleasant then, but later it will produce a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:11; II Corinthians 7:10), confirming the scriptures that Godly sorrow brings repentance which leads to salvation and leaves no regrets.

6.3.11 Introduce children to a church with sound doctrines where they can be nurtured further by those beyond the family as a way of establishing Christian networks and social relationships necessary for spiritual, emotional and social development appropriate for their ages. It is important to remember that holistic child development is a corporate responsibility though, parents, especially mothers, have a key role to play.

7.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

This study concluded that Christian mothers have a major role of nurturing spiritual development of their children as exemplified by mothers in the old and new testaments. The study also established that there are several approaches that Christian mothers could use to enhance their children's spiritual development. The study established that there are a number of strategies that Christian mothers can use to promote spiritual development of their children as determined by their ages, interests and abilities. Finally, while the responsibility to

nurture spiritual development of children is corporate in the Christian families and faith, it is highly influenced by mothers.

7.2 Recommendations

Christian mothers to model godliness in their lives as they teach their children Christian values. Though modern life is fast and overwhelming, it is important for Christian mothers to find time to nurture their children's spiritual development by recognizing that they are executing a sacred role on behalf of God Himself. Since most mothers feel inadequate and ill-equipped to nurture their children's spiritual development, the church should empower them through capacity building with necessary and appropriate knowledge and skills to develop or increase their competencies in this sacred responsibility.

Christian mothers must seek to identify age, interest and ability appropriate strategies that they can use on each child as a unique being. Besides, the church as an institution must be involved in complementing efforts of Christian mothers in promoting and nurturing healthy environments that fosters spiritual development of children. To comprehensively cover the scope of spiritual nurture of children, this study recommend similar studies to be done in this areas of study but focusing the role of fathers in nurturing spiritual development to bring out a comprehensive picture of parental role in nurturing holistic growth of their children.

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