

PRAxis OF PASTORAL CARE TO TEENAGERS IN THE NIGERIAN**CONTEXT**Adeyanju, Janet Omotola¹ and Akano, Omolola Adepeju²^{1&2}The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomosho, Nigeria**Abstract**

Pastoral care is the spiritual and morally sustaining concern of the pastors for their flock, of which teenagers are inclusive. Every teenager needs the full attention of the pastoral caregiver in the area of healing, sustaining, guiding, educating, nurturing and reconciling to God. The paper examined how pastoral caregivers can comprehend the peculiarities of teenagers in Nigeria to minister accurately and adequately to them. The findings of the study revealed that there is a wide generational gap that often causes a problem between adults and teenagers. It also revealed that teenagers have a hardened lifestyle when their survival needs are deficient or are neglected due to parental or societal challenges that negatively affect them. The paper recommends that pastoral caregivers familiarize themselves with the peculiarities of teenagers, especially in Nigeria, and also get a proper understanding and adequate deployment of the pastoral care functions to minister effectively to teenagers in this contemporary time.

Keywords: Pastoral care, Teenagers, Nigerian context, Contemporary, Praxis.

Introduction

Teenagers are curious people who behave as if the end could be seen from the beginning and, as such, want to get to the aimed end at a glance without thinking critically about the process it entails. At age seventeen, Joseph dreamt that he would be great, and he started sharing his dream with

his siblings with great enthusiasm as if the reality was immediate. It later caused him great pain, for which he never bargained (Genesis 37). The teenage years are a time of transition: from childhood to adulthood, from immaturity to maturity, from no responsibility to great responsibility, and from more parental oversight to less overt

control. With a clear understanding of the teenage personality, the pastoral caregiver could minister accordingly to them, taking into cognizance their strength and struggles without any sentiment.

Teenagers in Nigeria face many challenging situations due to economic, political, and insecurity instability that the country has been facing in the last few years (Amao-Kehinde 2009, 66). The pastoral caregiver is expected to be actively involved in the life of the teenagers and has to work to direct their steps aright by adopting the best possible methods to solve their problems according to biblical principles. Therefore, this paper examines the appropriate praxis of pastoral care to teenagers in the Nigerian context. To this end, it discusses the overview of pastoral care, the characteristics of contemporary teenagers, Nigerian teenagers' universal and peculiar challenges, and the practice of ministering care to them.

Overview of Pastoral Care

Pastoral care is rooted in the Christian church's teachings and organization. From Latin roots *pascere* (to feed) and articulated by the powerful metaphor of the Good Shepherd, pastoral care describes the

spiritually and morally sustaining concern of the pastor for his or her flock (Best 2000: 4). The ministry of under-shepherds and teachers goes beyond doing a job; it is a vocation (Prime 1989:14). Vocation is not just a summon or strong inclination to a particular state or course of action; it is also a divine call to religious life. God initiates ministry, calling man to join him in reaching out to his fellow man with his love and care to fulfil his mandate.

The core of pastoral care includes helping acts, which a representative Christian does to heal, sustain, guide, and reconcile troubled persons whose challenges arise in the context of ultimate meanings and concerns (Lartey 2003: 23). Given 2 Cor. 3:2-6 "Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competent is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life." The pastoral caregiver works with the consciousness that the focus of all the care given is to direct man back to God (Sarah 1999:23).

The pastoral caregiver aims to understand his parishioners' needs and

peculiar challenges. Pastoral caregiving is a vital ministry of the church. The act of God's caring for His people in all ramifications runs throughout the Bible, and He committed the act to His representatives on earth- pastoral caregivers and counsellors. Rendering care, both physically and spiritually, involves teaching, preaching, leadership, visitation, supporting, encouragement and comforting (Oyedele 2017: 6). Pastoral care encapsulates everyday expressions of care and concern that may occur during various pastoring activities and relationships (Hunter 1990:4). Jesus Christ exemplifies the perfect pastoral caregiver, He showed love and had compassion on people irrespective of their race, religion and gender.

Pastoral Care Functions

The basic functions of pastoral care are healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling and nurturing. Recently, some authors have included educating and empowering in the functions. The healing function of pastoral care aims to overcome some impairment by restoring to wholeness and leading to advance beyond the previous condition. Prayer is considered very important in

performing the healing function. Sustaining function is performed when healing seems not to be forthcoming. It is helping people courageously and creatively to endure and transcend difficult situations. The sustaining function can take the form of a four-fold task: preservation, consolation, consolidation and redemption. The guiding function of pastoral care is a spiritual direction given to a troubled person. It arrives at wisdom concerning what one should do when faced with the difficult problem of choosing between various courses of thought or action (Clebsch & Jaekle 1967:50).

Reconciling function of pastoral care stands alongside healing, sustaining and guiding. It means helping alienated persons to establish or renew a proper and fruitful relationship with God and one's neighbor. Reconciling involves forgiveness and discipline. It also seeks to re-establish a broken relationship between person to person and between people and God. The nurturing function includes the day-to-day care given to the parishioners in the form of visitation, prayer, preaching, teaching and discipleship, among others. It aims to enable people to develop their God-given

potentialities throughout the life journey with all its valleys, peaks and plateaus (Clinebell 1984:43). Nurturing involves training new members in the Christian life and religious education, which are crucial functions of a pastoral caregiver.

Characteristics of Contemporary Teenagers

Man falls into four life stages: childhood, teenage, youth, and adulthood. The most sensitive and challenging stage is the teenage – ages 13 through 19. It is a transition phase between childhood and adulthood, when various kinds of maturity, including puberty, are experienced, and which leads to reproductive psychological, social, and moral maturation (Csikszentmihalyi 2022:1). Teenagers desire to stand in the position of an adult without the attached responsibilities (Lateju 2015: ix). Teen years is the fifth stage in Eric Erickson's eight psychosocial stages. It is the stage of personal exploration for a healthy identity formation that can easily bring confusion (Cherry 2020:1).

Contemporary teenagers are categorized as belonging to Gen Z, or the young millennials, which, together with the

Millennials, constitutes the most significant population block. Gen Z alone has 32% of the global population. By this categorization, contemporary teenagers, as members of Gen Z, grew up with the internet as a natural part of their daily life endeavors. They have been exposed to Facebook, Spotify, Netflix, Snapchat, Instagram, and YouTube (Fry 2020:2; Golden 2019:1; Spitznagel 2020:1). Contemporary teenagers have left the world of information technology to the world of communication through the use of social media, which has both positive and negative implications.

Olson (1984) identifies eight personality traits of teenagers. The first trait is power-orientedness. Teenagers with this trait often appear strong, confident, and secure. They have the domineering trait and are ambitious and goal-directed. Teenagers access their self-worth with their performance and success and tend to be dictators and perfectionists. The second trait is a competitive personality which could make teenagers choose competition as a primary way of relating to others and also use it to ward off anxiety and insecurity. A competitive personality could

make teenagers narcissistic, as the personality only views issues from one's perspective and for one's benefit alone. The personality trait could often make teenagers snobbish. The third is an aggressive personality, which is an impressive and effective way of dealing with others. Teenagers are hostile to close friendships; have wrong self-concepts because their strength can be used to bully others. The fourth trait is rebellion, which could make the teenagers resentful, bitter, antagonists, complainers, and distrustful. This trait could also inform their acting out of the painful experience (Olson 1984:6).

The fifth personality trait of teenagers is self-demeaning. The trait makes them tend towards an inferiority complex. Avoidance of responsibilities and leadership positions is paramount to teenagers with this trait because of the belief that they are weak. This trait also makes teenagers masochistic in nature; they tend to associate pain and personal loss with pleasure. The sixth trait is dependence which is borne out of fear of failure or being inadequate. Many teenagers cannot stand independently but are always willing to depend upon somebody without submitting

to such. They are also confrontational. Another trait is the responsible personality. Teenagers like taking responsibility even when they are yet to be skilled. Each trait has a weakness and strength that requires a balance in an individual (Olson 1984:6).

Challenges of Nigerian Teenagers

Two categories of factors may determine the challenges facing Nigerian teens. The first category is associated with the universal primary needs that teens face worldwide. The second category is the contextual factors peculiar to teens living in Nigeria. These categories will be considered accordingly.

Universal Basic Needs of Teenagers

Choice theory, developed by William Glasser, identifies five basic needs woven into human genes and controls their choice of behavior. It insists that these needs internally motivate people to choose how they behave on purpose. Their behaviors are not the results of some external motivation of reward or punishment. Virtually all behaviors are outcomes of what the individual wants at the time. These five primary needs are survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun. Since these choices are purposeful, an individual

is responsible for his behavior (Sullo, 2011; Glasser Institute for Choice Theory, 2022).

Carey (2020:48) affirms that teens have the exact five primary needs based on Glasser's choice theory. However, the definition and degree are often different for adults. An adult may not consider what a teen needs for survival per se. For example, water, food, and shelter, which an adult considers essential, may be minor for a teen because social survival is more important to them. This is closely associated with their fear of missing out (FOMO), a situation where they want to feel they belong among their peers (Editor, Lagos Mums, 2020). Biologically, their feeling is more than their thinking because, at that age, about 20% of the brain that is yet to develop fully is that part which has to do with the function of reasoning, judgment, self-control, and planning (Carey 2020:18). Thus they are more emotional about issues.

Carey (2020:23) states further that the modern world poses fresh challenges to contemporary teens at different stages. At the early stage, teenagers need parental support to work out their identity; their thinking is still limited to right or wrong, with little abstract thinking. Teenagers are

self-conscious and have a deep sense of 'personal fable,' thinking they are too unique to fall into danger. In their actions, teens exhibit a sense of insecurity and a need for identity. Also, have an increased sexual desire, and as they grow through the middle teen ages, they increase their cognitive and analytical skills. Teens are likely to question rules and authority, including maintaining solid ideas about sexual orientation even when such ideas are wrong. Towards the final stage, they are more mature and can foresee consequences better, reducing peer pressure and less risky behaviours. At this stage, they have a better-thought process and become more nervous about the realities and responsibilities of adult life.

Peculiar Challenges of Nigerian Teenagers

Peculiar challenges of Nigerian teenagers revolve around specific problems in Nigeria. Though there are different dimensions to the Nigerian problems, this paper considers the challenges identified by Chukwuemeka (2022:1) and associates them with the teenagers' characteristics, primarily as it affects their five universal basic needs against their other

characteristics. Chukwuemeka identifies thirteen problems as follows:

Economic crisis: Nigeria is facing severe inflation; prices of goods and services have increased, and people's buying power with the same salary they earn has reduced considerably. The implication of decreased buying power directly impacts their survival, fun, and power, which is different from those of adults.

Ethnicity: Nigeria has a population of about 180 million in over 250 distinct ethnic groups. While this has diversity advantages, one critical disadvantage is their extreme sensitivity, which often results in ethnic violence. It poses severe challenges to the teen's need for belongingness and love.

The problem of amalgamation: Though there was an amalgamation of the North and South in 1914, each region still maintained its agenda. There is Northern agenda as there is Southern agenda instead of a single Nigerian agenda. This agenda also has some religious reflection since the South is known to be primarily Christian while the North is predominantly Muslim.

Inequality: Different categories of Nigerian people feel they are marginalized

by region, religion, ethnicity, class, status, and age division. Other times it could be a perceived unfairness by the government and its agency. Sometimes, teens feel marginalized by the rest of the age groups. This may be associated with their willingness to associate with protest against the authority. The October 2020 #EndSARS protest is a good example.

The problem of internal land conflicts: Land conflicts are common in Nigeria. Recently, there has been a face-off between the governments of Ogun and Ondo states over some coastal communities around their boundary areas (Olatunji 2022). The teenagers are traumatized as they grow into such experiences.

Resource management: Different groups agitate for a different formula for resource management. Unfortunately, only those involved in the leadership dictate the formula for resource sharing. This has led to the formation of groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). As teens grow into this, it affects their thinking significantly because their parents and older siblings are directly affected.

Corruption: Corruption has penetrated all fabrics of Nigerian society, involving abuse of resources and power. The Transparency International Corruption Perception Index of 2013 shows Nigeria as the 33rd most corrupt nation in the world. Teenagers grow up to consider corruption as a norm.

Terrorism: The Global Peace Index for 2016 marked Nigeria as the fourth most international war deaths. Terrorism has become a daily occurrence in Nigeria. There are kidnapping and abduction cases, killings, and rape by the Boko Haram, herders, and bandits, amongst other criminals. Since secondary schools are now soft targets, this traumatizes teenagers who feel that unknown shooters may abduct them.

Unemployment: About 24% of Nigerians are unemployed. The 2014 immigration agency job advertisement shows the severity of unemployment in Nigeria as over 500,000 job hopefuls applied for only about 5,000 openings. The teenagers consider it the next stage they are growing into and may call to question their need to go to school, especially when they see their peers making it through criminal activities.

Education system: The Nigerian education system has experienced several prolonged disruptions. As at the time of the writing of this paper, the industrial strike action embarked upon by the Academic Staff Union of the University (ASUU) is over seven months old and still unresolved. The strike compounds the unemployment state by making them unemployable. These teenagers are grossly affected because they form the majority of these university students and also part of the students waiting to secure admission into universities.

Infrastructure: From physical infrastructures, like road networks, to other infrastructures, like power supply and security architecture, Nigeria has suffered a significant setback. This setback hinders creativity among teenagers, thus affecting their basic needs.

Lack of skilled personnel: Brain drain in Nigeria is increasing at an alarming rate. It has become a phenomenon as “many middle-class Nigerians are heading abroad or say they plan to do so, hoping for a brighter future in Europe or North America” (Agency Report 2022). There is even a slang for it – ‘*japa*,’ a Yoruba slang

meaning to flee. Some young people can go to any length to secure an opportunity to flee 'japa.'

Inconsistent economic policies: A change in government in Nigeria is usually accompanied by a change in policies such that before a set of policies is implemented, a new government introduces a new set. When such changes continue, it affects the growing generation more than other population categories.

These highlighted challenges, amongst others, threaten the achievement of the universal basic needs of Nigerian teenagers. For instance, the economic crisis has made parents stricter with their resources, affecting the freedom and power they release to their teenage wards. Further, inadequate facilities are affecting their creativity and social survival. Insecurity is making parents exercise more control over their teenagers. Unfortunately, as earlier stated, some of these teens have not matured to such a cognitive and analytic level that they understand their parents. Consequently, they may manifest several signs of deficiency in these need areas.

Teens exhibit physical, emotional, or psychological signs when their survival

needs are deficient. These signs include enuresis (bedwetting), encopresis (defecating in bed), reduction in physical activity, hoarding food, running away from home, distrust of humankind, excessive or infrequent sleep, violent reaction to typical situations, significant signs of depression and suicidal idea, and detachment from loved ones. They also ask personal questions about being fed up with life (Carey 2020:57-58). Akinrinade (2020) laments that suicide among young persons, especially teenagers, is alarming. Empirically, the World Health Organization ranked Nigeria first among African countries and sixth globally with this severe problem. This adolescent death is common in low- and middle-income countries like Nigeria (WHO 2019).

When the desire for pleasure is unmet, teenagers could result to non-value related activities, including drinking, drugs, shoplifting, dangerous driving, and other dangerous activities that trigger adrenaline. Their interest could also change dramatically, leading to disengaging from enjoyable activities (Carey 2020:71). Medical research reveals that drug abuse is prevalent among secondary school students

with an average age of sixteen for different reasons (Idowu, Aremu, Olumide, & Ogunlaja, 2018). The desire for pleasures often leads to seeking illegal means of wealth acquisition, such as internet fraud (codenamed 'yahoo'), money rituals (codenamed 'yahoo plus'), and being vulnerable to enlistment by bad gangs. Since their pleasure is associated with someone getting hurt, this challenge may also be related to the proliferation of light weapons and firearms among teenagers or a desire they fulfil when they grow older.

When the freedom need of teens is deficient, there is a constant complaint of not having personal free space, claiming to lack autonomy and not being allowed to make decisions. Teens tend to be rebellious and defy orders which are usually associated with the difficulty of knowing when they are capable of handling responsibilities, making parents tend towards the dictatorial extreme (Carey 2020:78, 84). An example is to know when they can control their upsurge of sexual feelings resulting from the latent sexuality of their childhood (Csikszentmihalyi 2022).

Power is another basic need that has been affected by the Nigerian factor. Power deficiency makes teens dominate younger siblings or weaker peers. They often complain of not being heard or understood and want to manipulate their environment as they play right/wrong games of life. Teens also seek alternative power-fixing ways (Carey 2020: 90, 94). Bullying is a common phenomenon among teens in Nigerian secondary schools. Egbochuku (2007) discovers that 78% of children studied have experienced bullying while 71% have bullied another child. She claims that the phenomenon is more prevalent in public than private schools. Lawal (2021) discloses that it has become a culture leading to untimely death and lifetime physical and mental injury. Both Egbochuku and Lawal recognize the need for urgent attention.

Finally, when teens feel a deficiency of love and belonging, there is an exhibition of a sudden change in behavior, including new dress styles, type of music, favorite activity, unfamiliar slang, new groups, and more time on the phone. This is because they are intertwined with freedom and want to experience the stage of individuation,

whereby they separate themselves from the family to establish an independent identity (Carey 2020:98, 106). The implication here is that the decision of some teens to join bad gangs may be associated with this reality. Teens want to launch out to have new friends or groups, giving them an identity independent of their family. The critical part of the teenagers' challenges is that these five universal basic needs do not operate separately. Since they are intertwined, deficiency in one area may affect two other areas directly or remotely, making it a complex challenge for the teenager. Consequently, it may result in academic, psychosocial, moral, and spiritual challenges. Teen needs a caregiver that understands their predicament.

Ministering Care to Nigerian Teenagers

The Bible has provided different teenagers who fulfilled the purpose of God because specific individuals ministered to their needs in times of their challenges. Some biblical figures who enjoyed some form of care around their teen ages are Samuel, David, Esther, Jesus, and Timothy. Samuel grew from childhood through teenage to adulthood under the direction and

supervision of Eli, who taught him to recognize the voice of God as recorded in 1 Samuel 3. He experienced proper nurturing to be who God wanted him to be despite the challenges of living according to the pattern of Eli's two sons. For David, the challenge may be more psychological. He was forgotten in the field as a shepherd teen when Samuel came to Jesse's house. 1 Samuel 16 reveals that Samuel's pastoral insistence saved the situation. He anointed him to be a great king in Israel. Jonathan also cared for him when he faced persecution by King Saul (1 Samuel 19).

Other teenagers who enjoyed some form of pastoral care that saved them from challenges and made them fulfil their God-given purpose are King Joash, who began to reign at a tender age through his teen ages and amid the challenges of idolatries. The successful part of his reign is associated with the care of Jehoiada (2 Chron. 23, 24). Esther grew up under the tutelage of her cousin, Mordecai. However, there was the challenge of living a remarkable life in a foreign land. Jesus Christ grew into his teen ages being ministered to in the temple. The parents also gave Him adequate care when they left Him behind in Jerusalem.

Timothy, of whom Paul's assertion in 2 Timothy 3:15 experienced the same challenges, implies that through his teen ages, Timothy enjoyed the care of his mum and grandma and was later cared for by Paul. This pattern may be a standard through appropriate praxis.

Praxis of Ministering Pastoral Care to Nigerian Teenagers

The gospel minister's pastoral role is to help people involved in a crisis situation through a pastoral theological framework (Oyedele 2017:26). In this paper, a Nigerian teenager is involved in a crisis due to peculiar Nigerian contextual challenges. According to Ogundipe (2014), the aim is to enable teenagers "see and accept their crisis as means for physical and spiritual growth. The efforts and approach utilized in the process of helping are to shape the feelings, behaviors, and attitudes constructively" (104). To achieve this, they engage in specific practices of healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling, nurturing, educating, and empowering (Ogundipe 2014:80-83).

Healing: The purpose of healing is to overcome some impairment resulting from a crisis and restore the care receiver to

wholeness. This healing function may involve praying and counselling (Oyedele 2017:35; Ogundipe 2014:81). The pastoral caregiver needs to understand that Nigerian contextual challenges also affect teenagers in several ways. They may feel hurt because they know their counterparts in other countries have more opportunities than them. The pastor must ensure complete healing with any spiritual or psychological hurts for the teenager to be who God wants them to be.

Sustaining: This pastoral function helps to keep the status quo in the affected persons in the crisis when healing is difficult to achieve within a short period. It prevents the situation from degenerating further. The process involves preservation, consolation, consolidation, and redemption (Oyedele 2017:36; Ogundipe 2014:81). In the case of poor Nigerian teenagers hurting because of their poverty, the pastor must ensure palliative measures to help them endure until the challenge is over. Otherwise, the teenager may wish to abandon school and join bad gangs, including cultists, ritualists, 'yahoo boys,' and drug addicts.

Guiding: Guiding involves listening and giving advice to assist individuals involved

in a crisis. The pastoral caregiver must help the hurting Nigerian teens due to their challenging situations of joblessness, unstable academic process, and lack of adequate facilities like those of their peers in other countries. Teen achieves this function through relational teaching and making each party aware of what is at stake (Oyedele 2017:37; Ogundipe 2014:81). In this case, the pastor guides the teens on godly ventures. Teens may also need a guide in learning specific trades to complement their educational development.

Reconciling: Reconciliation is about restoring a strained relationship. The pastor's role is to ensure a restoration of the relationship. Reconciliation involves forgiving each other under the supervision of the pastor. The pastor must ensure that they create a suitable environment for facilitating smooth relationships through forgiveness. Sometimes, alienation and involvement in some practices associated with Nigerian teen challenges may reflect ultimate separation from Christ. The pastor must ensure the reconciliation of the individuals with Christ as the foundation of

mending a relationship (Oyedele 2017:37; Ogundipe 2014:82).

Nurturing: Through nurturing, the pastoral caregiver helps Nigerian teenagers to experience growth and development in their God-given potentialities amid their challenges. The teenagers are nurtured to eliminate any inappropriate relationships and behaviors they might have been lured into and make them accept a biblical lifestyle (Oyedele 2017:38; Ogundipe 2014: 82). It involves helping them to abandon alcoholism, drug and substance addictions and bad gangs and nurturing them to grow in their faith in Christ.

Educating: According to Ogundipe (2014), people facing a crisis can live well and better over and above their problems if they have the opportunity for constant re-education (81). It stands out as part of nurturing because it is critical to help the challenged teens assess and refocus amid their challenges. It will help them to remember fundamental issues they may have forgotten due to life challenges.

Empowering: Ogundipe (2014) stresses that "empowering in this sense connotes the ability to equip or strengthen the problem laden with frantic measures

that would physically, emotionally, psychologically and socially brace them up to face life challenges squarely” (83). The hurting Nigerian teenagers are to be restored to healing; they are also equipped for kingdom service so that, rather than looking out for help, they can offer themselves as solution providers in society.

Conclusion

This paper has addressed some issues confronting Nigerian teenagers, affirming that God desires all his creatures to worship him irrespective of their age group and peculiarities. It also stated that all parishioners, including teenagers, deserve to be nurtured and cared for because of the struggle with fundamental social identity between childhood and adulthood. Teenagers want to discover and practice many things above their age simultaneously. Given this, Pastoral caregivers must avoid stereotypes in their dealings with teenagers. The wrong mindset that all teenagers are a stubborn set of people who do not yield to positive instructions all the time should be discarded. Instead, a pastoral caregiver should go the extra mile to educate parents

on how to lead teenagers to a proper understanding of the love of Christ and the desire to walk in His footprint.

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Received on Jan 31, 2024

Accepted on March 01, 2024

Published on April 01, 2024

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