

NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

*Parents' Perception of their Involvement in the Spiritual
Nurture of their Children at Karinde Free Methodist Church*

BY
UYAMBAJE THERESE G.

*A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master
of Divinity in Christian Education*

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2006

JULY 2006

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Approved:

Supervisor:



Dr Suraja Raman

Second Reader:



Mrs. Rosemary Mbogo

External Reader:



Prof. Ruthie C. Rono

July, 2006

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN THE SPIRITUAL NURTURE OF THEIR CHILDREN AT KARINDE FREE METHODIST CHURCH

I declare that this is my original work and has not been submitted to any other
College or University for academic credit.

The views presented herein are not necessarily those of the Nairobi
Evangelical Graduate School of Theology or the Examiners.

(Signed)

Uyambaje Therese G.

July, 2006

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this grounded study was to understand and explain parents' perception of their involvement in the spiritual nurture of their children of six to twelve years of age. It explored parents' understanding of the Biblical teachings and their application to the same as well as factors hindering their involvement in the spiritual development of their children.

Data collected was by means of interviews with six parents who were hand-picked among the nine parents. These parents are members of Free Methodist Church/ Karinde.

The research findings revealed the following results:

- There is a need for children of six to twelve years of age to grow spiritually because it is a Biblical mandate.
- The Bible is the basic tool for spiritual nurture of children.
- Prayer, obedience to God and to the people, reading the Bible, teachings on the goodness of the church, respect to God and parents are the things the parents teach their children to help them grow spiritually.
- Home is the place whereby this spiritual growth takes place, though it is done occasionally.
- Parents' past spiritual experiences (both positive and negative) serve as motivating factors for them to nurture their children spiritually.
- Factors that hinder parents from being fully involved in nurturing their children spiritually include: lack of quality time, lack of consistency, forgetfulness and the feeling of inadequacy.

From the findings, some recommendations were proposed to the parents, the ministers of the church, and the Sunday school teachers in understanding the need of helping the children of six to twelve years old to develop spiritually, with a view of helping them better fulfill their God-given responsibility so that these children can embrace Christ Jesus as their Savior and become His disciples.

To
Dad and Mum

You are my heroes and through you, I have embraced Jesus Christ with all
that I am

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the Most High God for His provision, strengths, wisdom, health and sufficient grace throughout my studies at NEGST. To you Oh God I say a big thank you!

My family members: dad; for your frequent visits to see how I was doing in school; mum; for your prayers and encouragements, my siblings: Nicole, Louise, Fred, Diane, Meredith, Vivienne and Nelson: thank your for believing in your big sister.

My greatest friends: Harriet, Laurence, Janvier, Rachel, Faith Queen, Jean Baptist, Mozart, Isaac, Hauwa and Dema. You ministered to me in countless ways. I will miss you!

My dearest friend forever JAPI. God brought you at the right time; otherwise, I could have been confused.

To the little angels in my life at NEGST: Shelter, Isaac, Lydie, Rosy and Beraka (Babu). Thanks for sharing your joy and innocence in my room.

Angeline Savala for building a sense of confidence, hope, courage and victory in my life.

The staff in the Library: Patrick, Florence, Lillian, and Peter for your assistance when I needed your help.

My academic advisors: Dr. Starcher, Dr Cole, Dr. Raman and Mrs. Rosemary Mbogo for all the help and sacrifices you made from the very beginning of this study.

Mrs. Suzie Mercer and uncle Don for tirelessly proofreading this research.

Jane Kibue, the secretary in the student council for your great help in formatting this work. May the Lord grant you more strength and wisdom.

All that supported my studies financially at NEGST: Free Methodist Mission through Martha and Jim Kirkpatrick, Wayfarers Ministry, Educating Africans For Christ (EAFC), NEGST scholarship Committee, many individuals, colleagues and relatives who have met many of my countless needs while at NEGST.

All the parents who contributed tremendously in this study. May you be more of what God intended you to be.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

From the earliest days of the human race in the Garden of Eden “the family has been the most educational agency on earth” (Gangel and Wilhoit 1994, 68). God designed the family and gave parents full responsibility for the spiritual care of their children. The Hebrew nation never got away from the centrality of the home in nurturing children spiritually. The Bible places upon parents the responsibility of nurturing the spiritual lives of children. The book of Proverbs recommends teaching children when they are still small, thereby equipping them with the values that will become the guiding principles for the rest of their lives. It is the wish of all Christian parents that children grow in a good relationship with God. What parents want for their children is that they grow as children of God, who know the Bible and apply it in their daily lives.

Parents are encouraged to lay the ground work for their children to experience salvation, commit themselves to God’s loving care and guidance. Parents are to strive to make their children a priority in nurturing them spiritually so that those children are able to become whole in Jesus Christ. They need to know that they are to be role models to them, that they need to provide them with sound Biblical truth, discipline and love. To this effect, and because of the role of the home which is to facilitate, aid, and teach these Biblical principles, it is necessary to gain a detailed understanding of parents’ perception of their

involvement in the spiritual nurture of their children between the ages of six to twelve (preteens).

Problem Statement

Having been teaching children at Karinde Free Methodist Church for the last two years, I perceived the children as entirely dependent on the church's Sunday school program for their spiritual nurture and development. The parents of these children also attended the same church but appeared uninvolved in providing the spiritual nurture their children need. When children came to Sunday school, their behavior substantiated this lack of parental involvement. The Biblical teaching on the role of parents spiritually nurture their children is unambiguous, but the factors contributing to the lack of parental involvement at Karinde Free Methodist Church are not clear. I was interested in understanding the parents' perceptions of their involvement in the spiritual nurture of their children with a view to helping them better fulfill their God-given responsibility.

The purpose of the Study

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to understand and explain parents' perceptions of their involvement in the spiritual nurture of their children. It explored parents' understanding of the Biblical teachings and their application of the same as well as factors hindering their involvement in the spiritual development of their children.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the focus of the study.

1. What are the perceptions of parents concerning their involvement in the spiritual nurture of their children?
2. What do parents perceive as hindering their involvement in nurturing their children spiritually?
3. How does an understanding of Biblical teaching on the nurture of children help foster parents' involvement in nurturing their children?

These questions guided the researcher in understanding the perception of parents' involvement in the spiritual nurture of their preteen children at Karinde Free Methodist Church (henceforth, KFMC).

Significance of the Study

1. The study will enhance knowledge on the impact parents have on the spiritual development of their children.
2. The study will shed more light on the ways parents can be fully involved in nurturing their children spiritually.
3. The study will provide insights for the church on how to sensitize and encourage parents concerning their roles and involvement in nurturing the spiritual lives of children.
4. The study will provide an understanding of the contributions parents can make to the spiritual development of children in the local church from a Biblical point of view.
5. The study will be beneficial to the parents of the preteens in other Free Methodist local churches for the same purposes.

6. The study will give room for a rethinking of the expectations of parents in the light of God's intentions for spiritual care of their children.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study of the perceptions of parents of their involvement in the spiritual nurture of their children was delimited to the KFMC but is potentially transferable to other contexts. The study also initially confined itself to interviewing parents of children (aged 6-12 year old) who fellowship at KFMC. Due to time limitations and the unavailability of parents, the study was limited to interviewing only six parents who attend the church service every Sunday.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions reflected the use of certain terms for the purposes of this study.

Spiritual Nurture: This term is defined as a dynamic process focused on developing through phases of growth, healing, and renewal. It guides and equips disciples toward being as well as doing. Spiritual nurture produces an authentic maturity in Christ, which should be the goal of everyone's faith (Anthony 2001, 91). According to Dettoni, spiritual development is "an intentional, multifaceted process, which promotes the transformation by which Christ is formed in us so that we can become his continually maturing disciples" (1994, 16).

In this study, Gangel and Wilhoit's definition is adopted; i.e., spiritual nurture is a step by step and stage by stage process through which a child is guided, encouraged, nurtured, admonished, and disciplined to embrace Christ

as savior and be discipled to develop as a Christian through the work and the power of the Holy Spirit (1994, 235).

Preteens: The term Preteen refers to the children between 6-12 years old.

Christian Parents: This term refers to parents (either one or two parents) who are full members of the church and have given their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Role of Literature Review

Literature reviews help the researcher limit the scope of their inquiry, and they convey the importance of studying of topic to readers (Creswell 2003, 27). Creswell continues to say that the literature review shares with the reader the results of other studies that are closely related to the study being reported. It provides a framework for establishing the importance of the study as well as the benchmark for comparing the results of a study with other findings (Creswell 2003, 30). However, the orientation of a qualitative approach is for the purpose of discovery since it is an inductive study. The literature frames the study and generates questions to ask participants. This study therefore had the substantive literature before the data was collected.

Biblical Information of Parental Spiritual Nurture of their Children
Parents are the most important people in the lives of their children.

When God gave his servant Moses the laws that the Israelites were to follow and obey, parents were not excluded. They were given a special mandate on how to nurture their children spiritually. Parents were commanded to teach the word of God diligently to their children throughout the day, in every place and

in every circumstance. Both parents and children were to be guided by the word of God. Throughout the Bible, there are many references that show the role parents are supposed to play in nurturing the spiritual lives of their children. Therefore, this section elaborates the understanding of parents' perceptions of their involvement in the spiritual nurture of their children.

Deuteronomy 6:5-7 clearly provides the foundation of what God expected of the parents. This Scripture is the prime example of parental responsibility in teaching and modeling spiritual truths. Parents are to love God with all their being and diligently teach their children. This teaching is to be done by example and by their conversation at all times, during everyday activities of life. Deuteronomy makes it clear that education of children was a must and it was the responsibility of parents. This education was to be related to all aspects of life (Hall 1980, 27).

Before the exile, the education of children was carried out entirely at home by the parents. The father as the head of the home was responsible for this education. During this period of exile, synagogue schools were formed. Nevertheless, responsibility for a child's education remained with parents and still centered largely at home (29). Anthony agrees with Hall by affirming that it was always the plan of God that the family home would be the greenhouse for the growth of faith (2001, 206).

In the New Testament, not so much is said regarding parents teaching and nurturing their children (Murray 1975, 85). However from what is presented, it is evident that children are commanded to obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1), and that parents are to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). In many Pauline instructions, Paul

admonished parents in the churches to nurture and discipline their children and as Gangel and Wilhoit observe, "Not a single reference in the New Testament places this responsibility with the church" (1994, 236). Joyce agrees with this statement when she states that "gone are the days when we can leave the responsibility for raising our children to the school, the church, the neighbors, or the television" (1998, 17). Jesus also emphasized the significance of children and set an example of taking time to be with them and praying for them as we read in Mark 10:13-16.

Cognitive Development as Related to the Spiritual Development of Preteens

In order to minister to preteens, parents need to understand the cognitive development of preteens in relation to their spiritual lives. Children between six and twelve years old are classified under the stage of the concrete operational stage according to Piaget's cognitive stage of development. For these children, as Shelly observes, God is ascribed according to His actions [he loves, helps, and watches over us] (Shelly 1963, 21). At this time their sense of a personal relationship with God grows. Prayer consists of making verbal requests to God, and gradually develops into private conversation with God as the child matures. They understand the Bible in a concrete way and are able to apply its truth in their daily lives. Their commitment is more based on a desire to please Jesus than from a deep sense of sin, because at this stage sin is viewed as specific acts of misbehavior rather than rebellion against God (22).

In his eight stages of human development, Erickson observed that children between six and twelve years of age fall under the stage of industry vs. inferiority, whereby their conscience is developing, and rules being

important in both games and religious observances. During this stage, preteens begin to question the authority of parents and knowledge as the influence of peers and teachers is felt more and more (Shelly 1963, 247-63). The implication of these differences in development of preteens is that parents have to play a big role of being closer to these children so as to facilitate and help where necessary.

The Role of Christian Parents in Nurturing the Preteens

Role Model

All parents want their children to be the best they can be. Man's basic need for a model is one of the primary reasons that Jesus came on earth to live and walk among men, as He was and is still a model for people to follow. Whatever parents want their children to be and become, parents should become that as well. Commenting on this, Owen warns parents "do not just tell your children to be unselfish; instead model an unselfish life and instead of telling them not to be moody, you model the joy of the Lord" (1983, 208). She continues to say that in helping one's child to develop in any area is the development of oneself in that same area. She affirms "children may resent being told how to be certain kind of a person, but they will not resent being shown how" (209).

Parents are a major influence on the child's developing sense of spiritual values. From their behavior, the child gets his first impressions about what God is like (Haver and Waldrop 1981, 8). Children learn more through the relationships they have with the parents and the model or example parents demonstrate than the words said. The relationship parents have with God determines how they relate to their children, and how they free them to

become all they can become: trusting, open, honest, warm, affectionate, responsible, and confident in the Lord.

Children cannot see God but they can see their parents live in the reality of God's presence (Sherrill 1964, 32). Prayer, humility, reverence for God, and lifestyles that honor Him are all means of instructing the children regarding the reality and nearness of God. As parents practice the presence of God, children also learn the reality of God.

Children will imitate the behavior and the attitude of their parents. They too will begin to practice the presence of the Lord, not from a logical base, but from the base of an environmental example (Downs 1994, 147). In his thesis, Isoka quotes Fryling and Fryling affirms that "our children need to see us read the Bible for what it is worth, live by God's rules, love unconditionally, forgive genuinely, exercise faith unsparingly, and solve whatever problems we may have biblically" (1999, 17). To add to this, Isoka admits that parents' examples will stir the children up to live for God more than their verbal admonition and rhetoric.

Parents should be examples to their children. The power of example in a parent as Christenson observes, does more to train a child than any other single thing (1970, 87). Parents therefore should allow themselves to be trained by God, if they will train others. Christenson also affirms that nothing is more important in establishing parents' authority with the children than the example which parents set with their own lives (90). Parents should take into consideration that their words are very powerful in the process of nurturing their children. Draper says that "the most powerful method of teaching of all is the example of what each parent does, what each parent says, how he/she

does it, and the attitudes that accompany what he/she says and does” (1982, 34). The main teaching lesson that Draper is drawing as far as parental role model is concerned is that parents teach by example all of the time even when they say nothing, express nothing, express no opinions, and give no verbal clues. The child still picks upon their intentions and integrates this into his life.

The home is the best place for a child to develop faith. One of the greatest roles parents have as Gangel and Wilhoit discuss is to be good models to their children “No other means of child training pays such great dividends as modeling” (1994, 239). Day to day Christian living by the parents will enhance the Christian faith of their children.

Writing to the church in Philippi, Paul admonishes believers to do what they have heard and seen in him (Philippians 4:9). In this passage, it is clearly seen that Paul taught by his word and his example. He did not just teach the Philippians things to be known in their heads. He taught things which were to be done in their lives. Paul wanted them to learn to live as Christians. Parents, too, are encouraged to nurture their children in the same way.

In 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul tells people to imitate him as he imitates Christ. This clearly shows that he was their example. He imitated Christ. This is also what parents should do. They must imitate Christ. They must give a good example to their children so that they can safely follow them.

Unfortunately, some parents do not model what they say. They say good things, but their lives are bad. Their teachings will fail because they do not practice the good truths in their lives. By life example, children can see their parents practicing what they know. I strongly agree with what Gangel and

Wilhoit say that “many times later in life, children may not remember what their parents said, but they will remember their example” (1994, 240).

Teaching Biblical Truth

Deuteronomy 4:9(NIV) illustrates the calling of God to the people of Israel for the responsibility of parents for their children. The verse states “only be careful and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and their children after them”. Parents have the primary responsibility for teaching their children the truth of the living God. As Nangale puts it “Sunday and nursery school teachers and church activities should not replace parents’ full involvement in teaching their children” (2001, 12). Parents are the children’s best teachers and there is nothing more important in the children’s spiritual development than seeing parents teaching their children about the great God who made them and loves them.

In Proverbs, parents are asked to train up their children in the way they should go (Proverbs 22:6 NIV). Commenting on this verse, Gangel and Wilhoit observe that “the way he should go may be interpreted to mean principles in God’s Word by the way God has created and shaped the child in his own personality style” and they add that since spiritual nurture is a life long process, a child may mature and leave home but what he has been taught will remain for a lifetime (1994, 241).

I agree with Christenson concerning this issue of parents training up their children. She says that “every person comes into the world and into a body of Christ with a [sealed orders], a unique destiny to fulfill and that part of the calling of the parents is to help the child unseal his orders and discover

what it is that God means him to be and do” (1970, 64). Parents are to train up the children not simply in the way that any and every child should go, but also in the specific unique way in which he should go.

The teaching of children begins with thorough instructions. Patiently and lovingly, parents should teach children what they expect of them. Discussing this, Murray puts emphasis on parental instructions of their children. He says that parental instructions must be from the heart. He adds that when the Bible insists on training up a child in the ways he should go, it is not something to take lightly. “Train is a word of deep importance for every teacher and every parent to understand. Training is not telling, not commanding, but something higher than that” (1975, 87). Children are to be taught the word of God when they are still small. Wawire quotes Doherty as noting the dangers of waiting until the child is grown before teaching him the word of God. He asserts that factors such as materialism, atheism, sects, and crimes do not wait until the children are grown before influencing them hence the more reason why the spiritual development of children should be considered with great concern (1999, 7).

Parents are encouraged to teach their children how to obey them. They can be taught about God. They can be taught how to pray, how to be thankful for God’s provisions, and to be aware of God’s daily presence in their lives, even if He cannot be seen. They should always remember that they are commanded by God to teach their children.

Some parents cannot teach their children well because they do not know the truths themselves. Coon suggests that there is a need for parents to learn the word of God so that they can be able to teach this word to their

children (1985, 174). Deuteronomy 6:6 emphasizes that God's word must be upon parents' hearts. This means that it should be deep within the parents' thinking and actions. A parent cannot teach what he does not know. Wonderly observes that "we cannot train into a child that which we do not have ourselves... parents must practice what they teach if they are to be successful in training little ones.....it has been said that [the parent's life is the child's copy book]" (1959, 49). The implication here is that parents are to act as good patterns for their children. They must study and obey the truth of the word of God, and then they can pass it on to their children. Parents need to know Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, develop a personal relationship with him, have strong faith, and practice Biblical principles. They need to be growing spiritually so their children can see how they trust the Lord daily in difficult and adverse circumstances, as well as in pleasant and joyful times.

Nangale suggests that in teaching children, parents should use different methods (2001, 13). This is because children differ and therefore the methods to use in teaching them should also differ. They should be careful so that the teaching methods used are not contradicting what the Bible suggests. He also affirms that the goal and the purpose of teaching children should be good behavior toward God, towards others, towards oneself and towards God's creation. Thus, it should be a relational purpose.

Discipline

Parents are the main instruments in children's discipline. In fact, it is their God-given responsibility to discipline children (Makai 1998, 14). Christian parents should and must consider that God holds them accountable for the discipline of their children. If parents discipline their children and bring them

up according to his word, then they will have an approval and blessing, but if they fail to do so, they will experience his wrath (Christenson 1970, 91). Sala in his book *“Train up a Child and be Glad you did”* sheds more light concerning discipline. He states

Discipline did not originate with parents who needed a way to vent their anger and frustration on their kids. It began with God who gave us the concept as part of his plan to help the children grow up to be well adjusted men and women respecting their parents and the established order of their society (1978, 20).

Discipline should be done in love. Discipline done in love produces happy, well adjusted children. It produces obedience and confidence in the parents. Discipline begins with the life of the parents. Sala quotes Anna Mow who affirms that “most of the resentment against discipline is because parents are so undisciplined in their own lives” (1978, 82). It is evident that no parent can successfully discipline his child when he himself is not disciplined.

Parents should always remember that God holds them responsible for reinforcing the teaching and learning process with discipline. An illustration of this fact is how God punished the house of Eli the priest for the very reason that he failed to discipline his sons (I Sam 3:13-14). For Eli’s lack of parental authority and control of his sons, both he and they died violent deaths on the same day. The word of God holds the father responsible for the discipline of the children.

The book of Proverbs also puts it clear that it is the responsibility of the father to instruct and discipline the children. There is a need for parents to balance discipline with love. Sala emphasizes this point and says that “love without discipline is not love and discipline apart from love is only punishment”

(1978, 20). I agree with the author because discipline which is done in love reinforces the total impact of the teaching process.

Ways in which Parents can be Involved in the Spiritual Nurture of their Children

The following are some of the ways parents can use to help their children grow spiritually:

Devotions

Attendance at church, prayer meeting, and Sunday school, as important as they are, can never take the place of the family altar (Blitchington 1982, 66). Here is where family members develop Christian character, receive godly instructions, and learn to walk intimately with the Lord. God emphasizes the importance of daily instruction in the home when he says in Deuteronomy 6:6,7 “ these commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up”. Narramore states “nothing rejoices God’s heart more than seeing a family gathered around the Bible, worshipping, praying and learning of Him” (1957, 54). Even a very short time of devotions is valuable in the eyes of the Lord. Spiritual food, as Narramore continues to say, is like other food and it should be eaten daily if it is to do the most good (54). Family devotions should never be neglected. This is the time God speaks to his children through prayers and the reading of his word. They are one of the sweet fellowships with God and each other.

In this troubled world in which we live, Christian families cannot afford to neglect daily devotions because they keep the family strong. They are the

context in which children learn to pray and understand the word of God, as they apply it in their daily lives. The memorization of Scripture is mainly taught during the time of devotions. The word of God is powerful and it does not return to him void. Parents are to be assured that as they help children memorize Scripture; they are giving them the most important thing in the world. Narramore states that “the greatest knowledge one can have is to understand the word of God” (56).

Through the word of God, there is eternal life through Jesus Christ. Narramore affirms that knowledge of Scripture combats wrong teachings and unsound doctrines and prevents children from becoming entangled in what he calls “isms” and cults, and it will keep them from sin (58). This agrees with what the Psalmist says in Psalm 119:11 (NIV) “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you”.

Isoka, in the introduction of his thesis, testifies that he was exposed to Christian teaching at childhood, and when he reached later adolescence he tried to depart from the fellowship of Jesus Christ, but the biblical verses he had memorized at childhood kept coming to him (Isoka 1999, 7). This can be true to the children and it is therefore important that as parents help children memorize Bible verses they will enjoy hiding the word of God in their hearts for the rest of their lives.

Home Worship

Home worship helps each family member know Christ better. The purpose of home worship is not to be seen as entertainment. Rather, a primary concern in home worship should be studying and discovering God’s vital interest in each family member and the way each other can have a

personal relationship with the creator and the ruler of the universe. The role of parents here is to prepare their children to accept Christ as their personal Savior. The most significant step in spiritual formation is receiving Jesus Christ as Savior. There is no specific age at which this step is accomplished. In presenting the gift of salvation, parents should emphasize that God has a wonderful plan for humanity, that he is making a beautiful home in heaven for those who believe in Him and acknowledge Jesus as their Savior. During this time of family worship, parents are encouraged to teach children to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Titus 2:12). Parents are to pass on to them the values and principles as well as the vast historical and literal resources of the Bible (Blitchington 1982, 17). Parents are to acquaint them with great Biblical truth which can guide them from their childhood through old age.

Home worship is very important for parents to have because it promotes family communication. As parents and children pray and study the word of God together, they realize that they stand before God on common ground (18). Parents come to realize that their children are precious to the Lord, bought and paid for by the blood of Christ. Hence, this make the children begin to understand that their parents, although they are to be obeyed and respected, also have trials and temptations just as children do. Consequently, new understanding and appreciation of each other are developed, and lines of communication are opened (20). During the home worship, parents can take the opportunity to teach their children how to pray. Prayer is an important aspect of the Christian life in which children need to be encouraged.

In her book entitled "*Parenting in the Pew*", Castleman emphasizes the importance of teaching children how to pray during the home worship. She says that if children learn to pray, to speak to God, and to hear him speak to them, a solid foundation of faith can be set in their lives (1993, 82). God is so real and is able to establish communication with children, and He will never fade away. Parents should give children enough opportunities to enter into the prayer life at home. Parents should be careful in the way they teach their children how to pray. As Castleman observes, children may be taught to say [the grace of God] and God bless so and so, but very little is done (82). She, therefore, advises parents to consider the need to train their children to pray and not to parrot some Christian phrases anyhow.

The Content of the Teaching for Spiritual Nurture

As Gangel and Wilhoit observe, "the goal of spiritual formation is a maturing faith and a deepening relationship with Jesus Christ, through which we become more like Christ in the living of our every day lives in the world" (1994, 198). In order to grow in Christ, children must be taught what prayer is and how to pray. They need to learn what it means to be a member of the family of God, and what God expects from them as children of God. They must also understand the significance of communion, what God teaches about it, why and how we can participate in it meaningfully to glorify the Lord. Parents should also put emphasis on the principles from God's word on loving God and others, obedience, trust, forgiveness, patience, kindness, communication, values, and hope. These are the things that need to be taught to the preteens and for sure when these kinds of teachings are strongly

emphasized at this early age by their parents, their Christian lives will never be the same.

Summary of the Literature

In this section, I discussed how parents can provide spiritual nurture for their children ranging from age six to twelve years. The emphasis was given of expectations from God for parents to be role models, teach Biblical truth, and discipline their children. The ways in which this parental involvement can be realized and facilitated were also discussed. Parents are encouraged to introduce devotions in the family, whereby the children will be taught how to pray and memorize Scriptures, continually enhancing their relationship with Jesus.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY, METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This study sought to understand parents' perceptions of their involvement in the spiritual development of their children, aged six to twelve years of age. This chapter is intended to describe the means and conditions under which data for this study was collected and analyzed.

Qualitative Design

According to Strauss and Corbin, qualitative design is a way of gathering knowledge about the social world that allows the researcher to interact with participants in order to better understand the phenomenon under study (1998, 4). Creswell defines qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (1998, 15).

Creswell (2003) points out that qualitative research takes place in the natural setting. The qualitative researcher often goes to the site of the participant to conduct the research. This enables the researcher to develop a level of detail about the individual or place and to be highly involved in actual experiences of the participants. Qualitative research is emergent rather than tightly prefigured. This is because as the research goes on, the research

questions or data collection approach might change as the researcher learns the best question to be asked or the best sites at which to learn about the central phenomenon of interest. Creswell goes on to say that qualitative research uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic because it seeks to build rapport and credibility with the informants, and solicit their active participation in data collection.

I chose to use a qualitative design to study parents' perceptions in their involvement in nurturing the spiritual lives of their children at KFMC because of the above mentioned characteristics of that paradigm.

Research Approach

According to Creswell, there are at least five traditions in qualitative research: Biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study. Biographical research focuses on the life of individuals in terms of their history, events in their lives, interpretation of the meaning of the events chosen, and also the lesson learned from the study. Phenomenology focuses on the understanding of a concept or phenomenon. It involves the exploration of the "structures of consciousness in human experiences" (Creswell 1998, 15) in which the participant needs to have taken part in the concept being studied.

Ethnography describes and interprets a cultural aspect or people group or system, such as patterns of behavior, customs and the lifestyles of the people studied. A case study focuses on a specific case. A grounded theory focuses on developing a theory from the studied phenomenon.

The Rationale for the Grounded Theory Approach

I employed the grounded theory approach. As Creswell puts it, the intent of a grounded theory is to generate or discover a theory, an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon that relates to a particular situation. The theory comes toward the end of the study and can be presented as a narrative statement, a visual picture, or a series of hypotheses or propositions (1998, 56). Strauss and Corbin refer to this term as a theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in close relationship to one another. Strauss and Corbin continue to say that the researcher does not begin a project with a preconceived theory in mind; rather the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data (1998, 12).

The researcher preferred the use of a grounded theory approach because a theory derived from data is more likely to resemble the reality than a theory derived by putting together a series of concepts based on literature or solely through speculation. Grounded theories are likely to offer insights, enhance understanding and provide a meaningful guide to action (1998, 12). Using a grounded theory, I looked into the spiritual nurture of preteens, needing to understand parents' perceptions of their involvement in this spiritual journey. The data were obtained from six parents of Karinde Free Methodist Church through in-depth interviews. The use of interviews with open-ended questions allowed the parents to express themselves more clearly and they were able to ask for clarification in case they did not understand the question being asked. From the information that parents shared, a development of the following theory which related to the research

questions emerged: *“There is a need for children to grow spiritually because it is a Biblical mandate. The Bible is the basis for the spiritual nurture of the children. Prayers, obedience, reading the Bible, and respect are things that parents teach their children in order to help them grow spiritually. This nurture takes place occasionally and it is done in the home. However, lack of quality time, inconsistency, forgetfulness and the feeling of inadequacy are seen as hindrances for parents in their involvement of the spiritual nurture of their children. Parents’ past experiences in their spiritual lives (negative and positive) motivate them to nurture their children spiritually”.*

Permission for Study at KFMC

The researcher first of all had an informal discussion with the pastor of KFMC to seek his approval for carrying out a study in this church. The researcher also explained the purpose of the study and my collecting methods. Thereafter, the researcher asked the pastor for his support in ensuring the cooperation of the members in accepting to be interviewed. The researcher also asked for a letter of permission to carry out my study from the appropriate authorities at NEGST. The letter was to be a back up for my request for permission and cooperation in carrying out the research in KFMC. The researcher hand delivered the letter so as to have the chance to talk to the church leader of KFMC. After the permission to carry out the research in that church was granted, the researcher requested the pastor to talk to the parents who have preteen children in the church to willingly participate in the research by accepting to be interviewed. One Sunday after the service, the researcher met with the parents and shared with them the intention of the study and they willingly accepted to cooperate.

Research Design

For this qualitative study, data were gathered primarily by interviewing parents of the preteen children who attended KFMC.

The study was guided by the following three research questions.

RQ 1 What are the perceptions of parents in their involvement in the spiritual nurture of their children?

RQ 2. What do parents perceive as hindering their full involvement in nurturing their children spiritually?

RQ 3. How does an understanding of Biblical teaching on the spiritual nurture of children help foster parents involvement in nurturing their children?

Parents identified what they perceived as their involvement in helping their children grow spiritually, what they perceived as hindering their involvement in nurturing them spiritually, and what they thought the understanding of the Biblical teachings on the spiritual nurture of children would help in encouraging them to be fully involved. Conclusions were drawn in consideration of the analysis and interpretation of data from parents.

Sampling

According to Mugenda and Mugenda, sampling refers to the process of selecting a number of individuals for a study in a way that the individuals selected represent the large group from which they are selected, thus the individuals selected from the sample. They add that the purpose of sampling is to secure a representative group which will enable the researcher to gain information about the population (1999,10-11). Wellington defines a sample as small part of anything which is intended to stand for, or represent the whole (2000, 58). The study being qualitative in approach, allows for a non-

probability sample, because the focus is on in depth information, thus a purposeful sampling strategy is used. A purposeful sample is sampling done with deliberate aims in mind as opposed to a random sample or one chosen purely for its convenience and accessibility (199). The participants selected are those with the ability to provide the information needed and helpful to the study. In this study, the researcher hand picked six families from the nine possible families in the church. The researcher based this on their ability to give the needed information and on their availability. Face to face interviews were conducted because of their effectiveness in developing information (Weiss 1992, 3).

With the help of the pastor of KFMC, the researcher was able to make an appointment with the identified parents on a Sunday afternoon, when all would be available. We then arranged with them the time they would want to be interviewed. Parents were interviewed on different occasions. Some of them were interviewed right after the Sunday service; others were interviewed at their homes during the week. All participants were asked the same questions.

Methods of Data Collection

In the case of the grounded theory, the most common method for collecting the data is through interviews. Mugenda and Mugenda state that to obtain accurate information through interview; the researcher needs to obtain the maximum cooperation from respondents. He must, therefore, establish a friendly relationship with the respondent prior to conducting the interview (Mugenda and Mugenda 1999, 83). The researcher gets an opportunity to ask

questions so as to make comments intended to lead the respondent towards giving data to meet the objectives of the study (86). And as Weiss observes,

We can learn also through interviewing, about people's interior experiences. We can learn what people perceived and how they interpreted their perceptions; we can learn the meanings to them of their relationships, their families, their work and their selves. We can learn about all experiences, from joy through grief, which together constitutes the human condition (1994, 1).

In data collection, the researcher had a secretary with me at every interview so as to obtain accurate information. Also, during the interview process, the researcher noted important points on paper to gain a clear understanding of what was being shared by the participants.

The Role of the Researcher

In qualitative social and educational research, the researcher himself or herself, is the key data collection instrument. Since the research is carried out in a natural setting, the researcher gathers words, analyzes them, focuses on the informants' meanings, and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language (Creswell 1998, 14). The researcher, as the primary instrument, is helpful since the interview questions are just a guide. This means that the researcher can adapt the questions depending on the direction of the interviews. At the same time, the researcher is free to ask for clarification from the informants in the process of the interviews.

Method of Data Analysis

According to Mugenda and Mugenda, data analysis is the bringing of order to the information collected (1999, 203). Coding and organization of the

information into the themes and concepts is expected in this study. This will make interviews done to be transcribed first.

The procedure of data analysis involved open, axial, and selective coding. In open coding, the researcher examined the notes that were already transcribed which formed categories of the information. Categories are concepts derived from data that stand for phenomenon. They can be a problem, an issue, an event, or a happening that is defined as being significant to respondents (Strauss and Corbin 1998, 114, 124). The researcher read through the interview transcriptions as she made necessary margin notes. One way in which to begin coding is to write concepts in the margins or on cards as they emerge during analysis. As Creswell mentions, the data is reduced to “a small set of themes or categories that characterize the process or action being explored in the grounded theory study” (1998, 151). With the topic under study, categories were formed of the understanding of the perceptions of parents in their involvement in the spiritual nurture of their children.

Axial coding is the act of relating categories to subcategories along the lines of their properties and dimensions. It looks at how categories crosscut and link. Axial coding is essential to the theory discovery process. In the process of axial coding, the researcher selected one of the many categories and positioned it within a theoretical model. Selective coding represents a third aspect of data analysis in grounded theory research. Selective coding is the process of integrating and refining the theory. Integration here means the interaction between the analyst and the data (Strauss and Corbin 1998, 144). The relationships that emerged during the axial coding were validated by

searching for confirmation of the findings from parents. A “story” that connected the categories was built and a theoretical proposition was made at the end (Creswell 1998, 150, 302). The process of coding and categorizing continued until all the data had been considered and no new categories came up. Selective coding enabled the emergence of a theory, which is represented in a figure.

Validation and Verification Strategies

Validity is an essential element to the gathering of the data. In validity, the quality of the instrument or procedures for data collection is achieved. Creswell discusses eight primary strategies to check the accuracy of the findings (2003, 196). In this study, the researcher used a triangulation and member checking approach. In triangulation, information from different sources is put together to shed light on the central theme of the study. In the member checks, the researcher solicits participant’s views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations. The member check approach was done by taking the final report back to the participants to determine whether the information and result are accurate.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

The purpose of this study was to understand and explain parents' perception of their involvement in the spiritual nurture of their children between six and twelve years old. Data were collected through the use of interviews involving six parents from KFMC. The basic research questions used in collecting data were as follows:

1. What are the perceptions of parents concerning their involvement in the spiritual nurture of their children?
2. What do parents perceive as hindering their involvement in nurturing their children spiritually?
3. How does an understanding of biblical teaching on the nurture of children help foster parents' involvement in nurturing their children?

The data which were collected were analysed using the grounded theory methods leading to the discovery of a theory.

After the analysing of the data, the following views of the parents emerged. **“There is a need for children of this age to grow spiritually because it is a biblical mandate. The Bible is the basis for the spiritual nurture of the children. Prayer, obedience to God and people, reading the Bible, teaching on the goodness of the church, respect to God and parents are the things that**

parents teach their children to help their children grow spiritually. This growth should take place at home though not always. However, lack of quality time, lack of consistency, forgetfulness and feeling inadequate are seen as big hindrances and barriers for the parents in their full involvement in the spiritual nurture of their children”.

The theory can be explained in the following diagram:

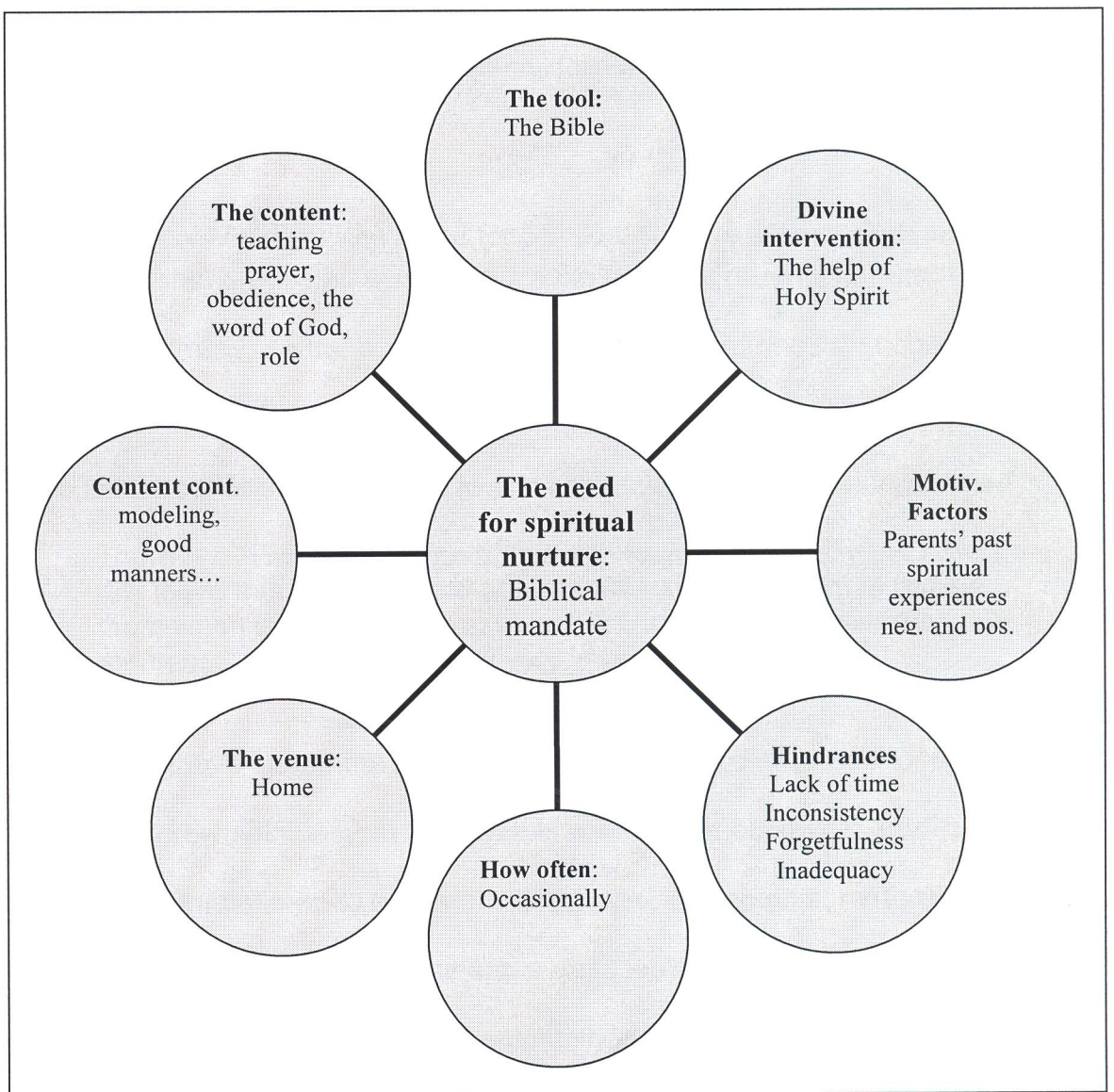


Figure 4.1. An emergent theory

The Need for Spiritual Nurture for Children of Ages 6 to 12

Spiritual nurture in this study refers to a step by step and stage by stage process through which a child is guided, encouraged, nurtured, admonished and disciplined to embrace Jesus as Saviour and be disciplined to develop as a Christian through the work and the power of the Holy Spirit. From the findings of this study, the spiritual nurture of children is channelled by their parents who are the main initiators of this growth. All the participants in this study were committed Christians. Five of them were married and one was a single parent. Below is just an overview of the question whether they considered spiritual nurturing of their children a need.

Parents Views for the Need for Spiritual Nurture of their Children

The study revealed that there is a big need for parents to nurture their children spiritually. All the respondents except one confirmed that children of this age are to be nurtured spiritually. To answer the question of whether there is a need for these children to grow spiritually, one respondent stated

There is a need for children at this age to grow spiritually because if we just leave them like that, we parents will have a problem to handle them when they have grown. In fact, it should begin earlier than this, I mean before they are six. It is very important.

The above statement indicates clearly that there is a need for their children to grow spiritually, in fact, as this respondent observed, it does not have to wait for children to be six or more years. The spiritual nurture should begin as early as possible. To the same question, another respondent agreed with the first that nurturing children spiritually is necessary because even the Bible says that "let the children come to me". This respondent gave an explanation of her statement by saying that if Jesus calls the children to come

to him, therefore He wants them to be like him, and there is a need for them to be nurtured spiritually so that they can be like him.

One respondent also said that there is a need for parents to nurture their children because,

As far as I know, knowing Christ is the best thing in life and it is the best gift that we parents can give to our children by helping them to grow in deep knowledge of him. It is my desire in fact that I bring my children up in the knowledge of Christ. I think we are like bridges for them to reach Christ (nodding his head).

To the same question, another participant agreed with the above in the following words:

Yes, you know, when you start with them early and continue teaching them, they grow knowing who God is. They learn to get closer to God and the parents. Some of us had not have chance to draw to God when we were this age, but for these ones it is necessary and important.

From the above responses to the need for spiritual nurture for children of age 6 to 12, it showed that parents are fully convinced that nurturing children spiritually is necessary and important.

The Bible: The Best Tool

Asking whether they base their teachings on a biblical basis, all the participants admitted that because nurturing children is a mandate from God, thus, there is no choice than to base whatever they teach on the Bible. This understanding is demonstrated in the following quotes from different participants.

One participant stated:

The Bible says to us to train up children when they are young for as they grow they will not forget. So that has been my motivation. In fact I remember our pastor one day he said in the church when he was preaching that, when parents do not teach their children, the devil will teach them for us. So from that day, you know, I decided to try and teach my children in the ways of the Lord before the devil does it for me.

Another respondent agreed with the above in the following words:

Yes, I base my training of my children from what the Bible says parents should do. God says in his word that we should train our children when they are still young. It has always been my prayer, but *mwaliimu* (teacher); time has been always a problem. You try to do it this week, next week you forget or you are committed to something else.

Another participant who was convinced of the biblical mandate of nurturing children admitted that in the following statement:

Yes, in fact the Bible should be our example. You see like Eli in the Bible, he did not do what parents are supposed to do to their children. Do you know his story and his sons? Yes! So because the father did not take time to teach them according to what God wanted, you know what happened. So, we should learn from the examples in the Bible. The Bible is there to follow but I do not know what happens sometimes. I don't really know!

From the above observation, the Bible is looked as the main guide for parents to use in nurturing their children spiritually. All the participants considered it to be the best example that all should follow and emulate because it contains all the principles and guidelines to be able to accomplish this task.

Proverbs 22:6 says "train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (though none of the participants mentioned which book the verse came from) was a common reference when it came to understanding Biblical principles of parents nurturing their children.

From the responses of the participants, it is clear that they also have in mind what happens when they do not take responsibility of nurturing their

children as one mentioned the example of Eli and his sons in the Bible, and another one referred to an example her pastor gave in the church that when parents do not take charge of nurturing their children, the devil will do that on their behalf. Therefore, it is worthy saying that parents' understanding of the Biblical principles and truths as far as nurturing children spiritually is perceived as helping and encouraging them to nurture their children spiritually.

The Content: What Parents do to Help their Children Grow Spiritually

Parents do many things to teach their children in helping them grow spiritually. Many parents agreed that there are many things to do in order to help their children grow.

Things like, teaching them how to pray, teaching them the importance of obedience to God and all the people such as parents, teachers and older people, teaching how to behave in the church and in school and even at home, teaching them how to say sorry when the children have done something bad, teaching them and encouraging them to have good manners towards people and small things (one parent said) like saying thank you when you are offered something.

When children are trained in these areas as early as possible, the participants were highly convinced that the lives of their children would never be the same. There would always be a difference in their lives, and that difference would always be seen when compared to other children who are not nurtured in the same way.

Most of participants said that they teach their children how to pray and the importance of prayer. Prayer is the most important thing that children

should know before any other thing concerning God. They should be taught how to relate to him and how to talk to him even when they are alone. Prayer being the first on the list of the things that are taught to children, obedience and respect are also emphasised. As one participant put it:

I teach my children the importance of prayer, the goodness of the church, the importance of obedience and respect to everybody. I teach them that they cannot go anywhere when their parents do not know. I also teach them respect to the point that the young sister can feel free to send the older to get something for her.

Parents regarded prayer as the most important thing to introduce to their children at this age. As some mentioned, it can be introduced even earlier than six years.

Parents understood that when children are able to express themselves in prayers, then they are able to learn other things related to God. They understood that daily prayers, reading of the Bible and taking time to explain the verses read, praying together for different prayer needs as children are given that first priority can enhance their children's spiritual lives. When children are introduced to praying for various prayers such as: "God help dad, mum and grandmother, my teacher" ...later on as they grow they are able to pick up very easily as they pray for bigger things. Singing together with children also becomes a source of spiritual growth for children.

Sometimes, as some parents admitted, children are the ones who choose which songs to be sung. Parents also agreed that it is important that children are taught the value of going to church and loving the church. The reason given by parents as to why they would teach their children the value of going to church was that it is because when he goes to church with the children, when they get back home after the service, children are asked to

report back what happened in the church. They are able to recall what they learnt and who taught them in the Sunday school, songs they have sung and the memory verse they have learnt and they have to say. The parent asks them what the song means or what the verse means to them, and if they did not understand, then it became a good opportunity for the parent to share about Jesus and explain to the children whatever they were not able to understand in the church.

Actions Speak Louder than Words:

Role Modelling

Children see their parents as mirrors through which they see their images. They always want to imitate what they see their parents doing. They always want to identify with them in every thing they do.

A part from teaching biblical truth to children, a few participants identified role modelling as another way of helping their children to grow spiritually. One participant mentioned the fact that the most important thing that parents tend to neglect is the issue of being a model to their children. She commented that her children are very observant, so this made her very careful in what she does or says. She explained this in the following statement:

My children are very clever, like the small one who is now seven. When I do something small he asks me why I have done it. You have to be careful in what you do, because they see. I also make sure I say something good, because when you insult let's say people, they will also learn from you and start insulting others, and for them it is not bad because they see their mother also doing that. They will imitate you.

Another respondent in agreeing with the first respondent mentioned the fact that one needs to be extra careful in how parents talk and how they do things

at home before their children. He says that these children are clever enough to even embarrass you before people. They can do what they have been seeing you doing, and when you try to ask them why they are doing it, they respond by saying that “even you, you did like this or you said like this that day”. As a parent you feel embarrassed and even ashamed. He went further to add that, very often, parents forget that it is their fault because sometimes children carry the blame. He finished his statement by challenging himself and other parents that it is good to do the right things and to say the right things because children watch every single activity that parents get involved not only at home but every where they are.

These two participants recognized the importance of being a role model or living an exemplary life to their children. The mentioning of parents being embarrassed and ashamed suggested that in their innocence, children perceive their parents to be people to be emulated and they trust whatever they see them doing or saying.

The Venue for Spiritual Nurture

All the participants agreed that the spiritual nurture of their children should start at home, not in the church or in school. One participant stated:

Home is where spiritual nurture begins. Those who think the Sunday school will help their children to grow in the ways of God are missing out the basics for their children. It should begin at home before one takes them to Sunday school. Even in schools, CRE (Christian Religious Education) is not enough for them. Yaaah! Home is good for teaching my children!

This participant and others admitted that basic teachings of the things of God should begin at home with parents being the initiators.

Frequency of Initiating the Ways of Spiritual Nurture for Children

For some parents, their perception was that spiritual nurture of children

is a day to day activity. Half of the participants stated that they deliberately initiated the ways of spiritual nurture of their children on a daily basis. One of the six participants confidently mentioned that it has become a rule for her that every evening before dinner is served, it is time for devotion. This is a time to pray and share the word of God. In fact, she stressed that the family has set an alarm clock to keep reminding them that they need to get together for the evening meeting. Asked why she has made it a rule for the family, she responded that if it is done only one day, children cannot grow spiritually. She emphasised her point by saying that “we need to meet every day to read and meditate about the word of God on a daily basis”. Another participant recognized the fact that it is also important to nurture the children as often as possible, though, as he put it, there are many hindrances (as will be discussed later). He said that “spiritual growth, just as natural growth does not happen in a single day”. He put it in these words:

“Though I am not always at home and my wife being a business woman, we try to meet together in the late evenings or mornings, but it is not easy as you think and for sure for us it does not happen daily”.

For this participant, though he observed some challenges in having devotion on a daily basis, he recognised the fact that spiritual growth cannot take place in a single day. It is a process. He brought this point home by comparing the natural growth and the spiritual growth which does not take place in a single night. On the other hand, some participants were very sincere when they shared that it is hard for them to be consistent in keeping family devotions on a day to day basis. The following quotes show what happens to such families:

Participant 1. To be sincere with you *mwaliimu* (teacher), and please do not take it bad, not always ; because I'm not always at home and when I come I am so tired and just go straight to bed. Or other time we find the children have already gone to bed and we find it hard to wake them up, putting in consideration that they are also tired from school and with their homework, but anyway, mama tries to pray for them when they are going to school in the morning.

Participant 2. For us, it always depends on when we all are free. So when everybody is available, we read the Bible, tell the children what is good, and that they should avoid bad friends, I mean how to live a good life with others.

Participant 3. In my case, we do it but not always. Sometimes especially when visitors are in our house we do it and it is a requirement that all the children come in the sitting room to pray with us, but somehow, for the next days, it stops for reason I can't explain.

For these participants, there was the understanding of the importance of having time with the family during evening fellowships, but for the first participant, there were challenges that made the fellowship not happen.

For the second participant, there was that knowledge of what to do during the devotional time, but it happened occasionally when there was free time, or when they were all available. There was no such arranged time for everybody to be together as a family. Availability and time dictated the occasion for spiritual nurture. For the third participant, only when visitors were at home, were the children called to come and be with the rest of the family. This again happened occasionally.

Factors that Hinder Parents from Being fully Involved in the Spiritual Nurture of their Children

Lack of Quality Time

All the participants agreed on one common thing that they perceived as hindering their full involvement in the spiritual nurture of their children. Even the few participants who mentioned that they tried their best to nurture their children on a day to day basis, they admitted that there were hindrances to doing it perfectly.

The commonly shared concern was the lack of quality time.

All the participants are church members who reside in the vicinities of the city of Nairobi. The majority of them have full time jobs in their work places. All the participants shared their concerns that as far as they know, spiritual nurture is important and necessary to encourage growth in the Christian lives of their children. However, time is their biggest hindrance. The majority said that because of the nature of the work they do, they find themselves not taking enough time to be with their children so as to teach them or inquire from them how they are doing in their spiritual lives. One participant expressed this concern by saying that sometimes when they come from the work in town and there is traffic jam on the way, they reach home at around eight to nine in the night. By this time, they are exhausted, and sometimes there is not even time to make a small prayer for the family. It is until the next day that they remember they have not prayed.

Another participant also hinted that coming late because of the nature of the work they both have is a challenge for their involvement in helping their children grow spiritually. They indicated that sometimes they get home when the children are already in bed and they feel it is not good to wake them up.

As a result, they found that there was actually no time to help their children to grow in their spiritual lives.

Inconsistency

Inconsistency was another challenge that parents regarded as a barrier for their involvement in the nurturing their children spiritually. All the participants admitted that there was a problem of not being consistent with what they are supposed to offer their children. They shared that life in this city of Nairobi is difficult and busy, and one has to struggle and work hard to earn a living. They said that they become so busy with work and family matters, and they realized that it was difficult to keep or to be faithful in their commitment to cater for the spiritual lives of their children.

One participant pointed out this concern in the following words:

Children need to grow spiritually, and we parents are the ones to help them in this growth of the things of God, but as far as I'm concerned I have a problem of not being consistent. You know for sure that it is your responsibility and that you really have to be there for your children, but I sometimes tell myself, this week I will do my best to pray with my children. I do it today, tomorrow, but the rest of the days, I find myself not at home at the agreed hours of prayer, or I find myself telling the children to go and sleep especially when I see that they are struggling with sleep. So I see inconsistency as a barrier for my ministry to my children.

Forgetfulness

There was also this issue that kept reoccurring in the discussion concerning the factors that hinder the involvement of parents in nurturing their children. Half of the participants said that there was also the problem of forgetting. They said that sometimes they can all be home to spend the

evening together. Then they forget that they were supposed to have a time of fellowship together with their children.

To the same concern, one of the participants was a single parent. Sharing on what she perceives as hindering her from being fully involved in nurturing her children spiritually, she indicated that it was not an easy task for her. The following words expressed her concern:

As for me, it is very difficult to really teach them because I work in town and I have two sons of age seven and eleven. I'm a single parent. So sometimes it is very difficult for me to even remember that there is a need for that. Being one parent makes me lazy until I do not think of the spiritual needs for my boys. I'm just alone and I cannot do it the way it is supposed to be done. If we were two parents, fine. We could even remind each other in case we forget that there is a need for the children to be taught the word of God.

Apart from not having enough time and consistency in taking care of the spiritual needs of the children, the above quote shows another unique dilemma of what hinders some parents to be fully involved in the spiritual nurture of their children. The challenge of being a single parent is seen as a barrier that hinders this involvement. A single parent faces many challenges of life making it very hard to concentrate or even realize the needs for spiritual growth in their children. For this single parent, she only depended on the church Sunday school teachings, because as she mentioned she always reminds her children not to miss the church on Sundays. So for her, forgetting and being the only parent for her children was a big hindrance for her involvement in nurturing the spiritual life of her children.

Inadequacy

A few participants admitted also that there was another challenge they she used to face but with time they have already dealt with it. They said that

because their husbands were ministers in the church, they used to think that it was the responsibility of the father (their husbands) to provide spiritual nourishments to their children, the way they do for the church members. One of them expressed herself in the following statement:

My husband is a pastor, so for me I used to really think that it was his duty and responsibility for him to also take care of the spiritual lives of his children. Because he preaches in the church, me [sic] I felt inadequate to tell the children to pray or teach them the word of God because I felt my husband knew the Bible better than me. So I could even tell the children that we have to wait for dad to come so that we pray and read the Bible together. Sometimes I could wait until late in the night and when he did not come, I could tell the children to pray the "Grace". It was later on that I discovered I should also learn something small so that my children will not feel that it is only their dad who can do it.

The above expression shows how some of the parents faced the challenge of feeling inadequate in carrying out their God given responsibility of taking care of the spiritual lives of their children. The "I cannot do it" feeling is a big hindrance for parents in their involvement in the spiritual nurture of their children. As the participants shared, it took them time to realize that they were doing harm to their children by feeling that only their husbands who were pastors could minister to the spiritual needs of their children. Though they confessed that they had overcome that barrier, still it was a hindrance to their involvement in nurturing their children spiritually. This can be shown in the following figure (figure 4.2).

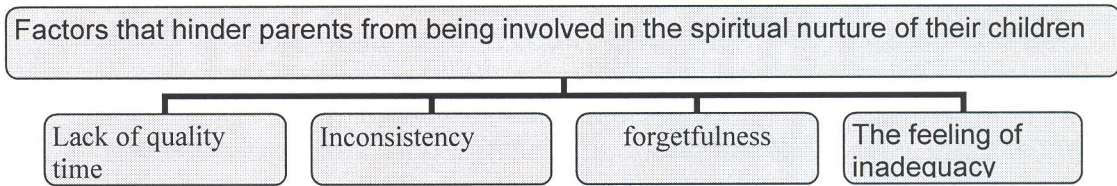


Figure 4.2. Factors that hinder parent's involvement in the spiritual nurture of children

The above figure indicates clearly the lack of quality time, inconsistency, forgetfulness and the feeling of inadequacy as the factors that parents perceive as hindering their full involvement in the spiritual nurture of their children.

Motivating Factors for Parents to Nurture their Children Spiritually

Parents' Own Past Spiritual Experiences

Childhood experiences and past memories of parents were very central as factors that motivate parents to want to care for the spiritual lives of their children. Parents felt that what happened to them when they were growing up as children had impact on their involvement in nurturing their children spiritually.

Asked why they would say so, different participants responded as follows:

Participant 1. I was born and brought up in a Christian family. My background is Christian. Since I was a small child, my parents helped me a lot in my spiritual life. I feel I am an example and this keeps me alert that I should make sure my own children have a Christian life as early as I did. Even if they get spoilt later on, which of course is not my wish (smiling), but at least I have done my best when they are still small.

Participant 2. Some of us were not able to even go to the Sunday school, because our parents never used to go to church. So we used to spend the Sunday washing our school uniforms, fetching enough water for the week or taking care of the goats. As I grew up, I never thought there was any need to go to church. But when I got married and got saved, I started going to church with my children as they began attending the Sunday school classes. At home, my children could sing, recite Bible verses, and I and my husband started joining them in their worship. We started by teaching them other songs, and helping them to understand what they were memorizing. We started just like that and now we have made it our goal to help them as parents. We don't want them to wait until they are married like us to know the things of God.

Participant 3. I came from a Catholic background family. We used to attend the church every Sunday but we had no chance for evening fellowships at home to pray or to sing and to read the word of God together with our parents. So I do not want my children to grow that way. I know the goodness of Christ. I want my children to grow knowing how it feels to grow in Christ.

Participant 4. My parents insisted time for devotion and reading of the Bible when I was a small child and since then I have known God and Jesus for many years now. It is important because there are many evil things that you escape because you have known Jesus early. It has been my prayer to do the same for my children. Even though sometimes I could sneak out to bed, but I could hear what they were saying in that devotional time and they really helped me in my growing in Christ.

Participant 5. What I went through as a small child was not good and I would never want my children to experience the same things. We did not even use to pray even for food. I knew how to pray when I joined high school, and I remember one incident I was told to pray for food during lunch time in the dining hall. The only thing I knew was that when people are praying you have to close the eyes. So I just closed my eyes, students waited for me to pray until they got tired and started laughing. It was so embarrassing for me and from that day, I started attending Christian fellowships and that how I knew how to pray and even sing. So for me, my children have to know these things before it is too late.

Participant 6. Yeah! I thank God for my parents. I do not think I could have managed my own children without putting in practices what I have seen them doing for me. We used to pray, sing, study the Bible. Dad could give us Bible questions to answer the next day. So we could make sure as children we knew the answers. We also used to compete

because dad could give the winner something like sweetie to take to school the next day. This homework helped us read the Bible everyday. I would like to instill the same things in my children. This really helps and for me I do not regret for this because as I was growing, and especially when we were doing CRE, nothing really was new. I felt good that I knew the things of God. I could even teach other children, or tell them stories from the Bible as dad used to tell them to us.

As illustrated in the above statements from different participants, it is very clear that some parents have positive experiences and others have negative experiences from their childhood. All of these experiences have made them make a decision on how to be nurturing their children. No matter what they went through, whether positive or negative, the impact it had made is positive. Those parents whom their parents initiated the ways to nurture them spiritually stated that what their parents have done for them have made them want to do the same to their children. Parents whose parents seemed not to care about their spiritual lives also admitted that they would never want their own children go through the same experiences.

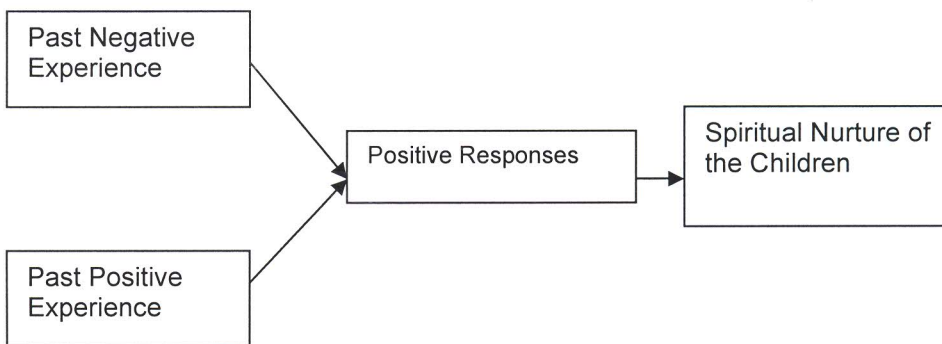


Figure 4.3. Motivating factors for parents to nurture their children

As illustrated in figure 4.3, both positive and negative experiences of the parents serve as motivating factors for them to nurture their children spiritually.

The Need for a Divine Intervention

The Help of the Holy Spirit

All the participants mentioned the fact that this issue of nurturing children in the ways of God is not as easy as one would think. Therefore, they mentioned that they all needed the power of the Holy Spirit to help them so that they are able to do the right thing. The relying on the help of the Holy Spirit was an indication that parents recognized their weaknesses in doing what was required of them as far as nurturing their children was concerned.

As one participant clearly stated:

We may think that this is a simple assignment, but it is not. We need some help from our Father God. We really need to depend on the Holy Spirit of God who can teach us parents before we teach our children.

Another participant also mentioned that:

We cannot do it alone and that is why some of us are not doing the necessary things in giving our children the spiritual help. Like for me, I know I cannot do it perfectly, so I always ask God to send me His Holy Spirit to guide me on how to teach my children. I realize that in my own strength, I will just be doing my own things. I cannot do it all and God does a better work for my children.

As stated by the parents, the dependency on the power and the help of the Holy Spirit is necessary in the spiritual nurture of the children. He is the best teacher who is able to teach, empower and remind parents to do what God intended them to do in nurturing their children in His ways.

Parents' Recommendations

The parents were given an opportunity to share what they thought should be recommended to their fellow parents in the church concerning the spiritual lives of their children. The respondents encouraged themselves by admitting that, the questions that were asked to them opened their minds and allowed them to realize how important it was for their children to grow in the

ways of God. Some admitted that it had never occurred in their minds that it was a big deal to seriously think of spirituality in the lives of their children.

One respondent said:

I'm happy for the questions you asked us. They really helped me and my wife to evaluate ourselves. As a family, we have not been so keen to know that our children need also to grow in the things of God. We think so much on their academics in school. That is what we normally look for: how they do in school, if they have done their home works and not caring about the other side of their spirituality. This is good and we are going to do our best now.

Another respondent convincingly cautioned:

If we cannot teach our children, who do we expect to do it for us? They are our children, and they are gifts from God, and God expects us to teach them about him

Asked whether they had anything to encourage other parents in the church, the respondents reminded the parents that even if it is not easy to nurture the children in the things of God, they should remember that it is their responsibilities to do it. They all admitted that God requires them to train their children when they are still small. They also reminded their fellow parents that what and how they teach their children should first be reflected in their [parents] lives.

Summary of the Findings

Parents are the most important and most influential people in the spiritual lives of their children. The purpose of this study was to find out parents' perception of their involvement in the spiritual nurture of their preteen children. The findings of the study show that there is a big need for parents to be fully involved in the spiritual lives of the children, as it is a mandate from God and therefore needs to be obeyed.

Parents identified the ways in which they facilitate the spiritual lives of their children. Some of those ways are teaching children how to pray. They said that prayer was the most important thing to teach their children when they are still small.

Reading the word of God together was another way to help the children grow spiritually. Teaching them the importance of obedience both to God and others was also mentioned as a way of helping the children grow in their spiritual lives. The importance of good behaviour in the church, teaching them “small things” like saying thank you and sorry, good manners and respect were also seen as things that would enhance the spiritual lives of their children.

Parents stated that role modelling is also important in helping their children grow in the knowledge of God. However, they identified that their own past experiences, both negative and positive have helped them to really try their best to provide the spiritual nourishments their children might need. Some admitted that their past negative experiences have made them determined to care for their children spiritually because they would not wish their children go through the same experiences they had. Those who had positive spiritual experiences in their childhood have taken it as a motivating factor for them to want to do even better to nurture their children spiritually.

There are challenges of hindrances or barriers to the full involvement of parents in their nurturing their children spiritually. Parents were able to identify lack of quality time, inconsistency, forgetfulness, and the feeling of inadequacy as things that hinder them from being fully involved in the spiritual nurture of their children. Moreover, they admitted that there was a need for a

divine intervention. The Holy Spirit was to be depended upon to teach, guide, and remind the parents so as to be fully involved in the spiritual nurture of their children.

| | |
|--|---|
| Parents | Key figures in the spiritual lives of their children with the Bible being the basic tool to use |
| The need for the spiritual nurture of children | It is a mandate from God |
| Ways to facilitate the spiritual nurture of children | Teachings on prayer Reading God's word together Teaching obedience Teaching good behaviour Teaching respect Role modelling |
| Factors that contribute to the involvement of parents in the spiritual nurture of their children | Past positive spiritual experiences Past negative spiritual experiences |
| Barriers that hinder parents from not being fully involved | Lack of enough quality time Inconsistency Forgetfulness The feeling of inadequacy |
| Divine enablement | The help of the Holy Spirit: to teach, remind and guide parents in this task. |

Figure 4.4. Findings on the parents' perceptions of their involvements in the spiritual nurture of their children

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on my findings, a theory emerged, and the recommendations were given on the implications drawn from those findings to the parents, pastors, and Sunday school teachers concerning the need for spiritual nurture of preteen children.

In carrying out the study, three basic research questions were used:

1. What are the perceptions of parents concerning their involvement in the spiritual nurture of their children?
2. What do parents perceive as hindering their involvement in nurturing their children spiritually?
3. How does an understanding of Biblical teaching on the nurture of their children help foster parents' involvement in nurturing their children?

This chapter provides a summary of the findings that could enhance an understanding of parents' perception regarding their involvement in nurturing the spiritual lives of their children

Summary of the Findings

The analysis of the collected data reflected the findings. The study of parents' perception of their involvement in the spiritual nurture of their children revealed that there is a great need for children to be nurtured spiritually

because first and foremost, it is a mandate from God. The study revealed that the Bible is a tool and a guide to use in nurturing children spiritually. All that is to be done should be based on the Bible. Parents of the children admitted that some of the ways to initiate or to encourage the spiritual nurture of their children are: teaching them how to pray, teaching them the value of obedience, teaching them respect, reading the word of God together, teaching them good manners, singing together, and being their role models. Home was seen to be the venue whereby this spiritual nurture should take place because as one participant mentioned, "Christian values start at the house". The study also revealed that the spiritual nurture of the children takes place occasionally, not always. This study sought to discover the hindrances to the spiritual nurture of their children. It revealed that spiritual nurture of children is not as easy a task as one would think. There are some barriers which make parents not do it accordingly. Things like lack of time, lack of consistency, the problem of forgetting, and the feeling of inadequacy were discovered as hindrances. Both positive and negative past spiritual experiences of parents were discovered as motivating factors to the parents' involvement of the spiritual nurture of their children. Parents realized that they needed help from God through the help of the Holy Spirit in helping them fulfill what He intends them to do for their children.

Recommendations

Apart from what parents perceived as things that help their children grow spiritually (praying, singing, reading the word of God, teaching good manners, teaching them respect and role modeling), there are a lot of things

parents should do to enhance the spiritual growth of their children. Things like providing godly discipline should be included, since parents are the main instruments in disciplining their children.

In the findings, most parents admitted that they felt inadequate in taking up the mantle of nurturing their children spiritually. In the same way, they felt that it was the responsibility of the father to take care of the spiritual lives of the children. There is a need for understanding Biblical principles in the responsibilities of both parents in caring for the spiritual lives of their children. Both parents should come to the realization that until they take this as a ministry that the Lord has entrusted them, they will continue to think that it was meant for only one of them. Parents should grasp the whole concept of what God intended them in regard to their role in the spiritual development of their children.

The church is encouraged to provide seminars for parents about their responsibilities and roles of nurturing their children spiritually. The ministers of the church should also try to minister to the children in the church. This would be done by encouraging parents to understand that it is their duty to provide the basic Christian needs of their children. They should remind parents that what children get from the Sunday services is not enough and should come in addition to what they are taught at home. Pastors are in a better position to give moral support to the parents by stressing the fact that the home provides Christian teaching that children need from an early age.

Sunday school teachers should also get involved in making sure they understand these children and that they know what happens in their homes concerning their spiritual lives. As they teach these children on Sundays, they

should try to inquire from the children whether their parents provide spiritual needs at home. This understanding will help teachers to know which aspects of spiritual life are to be emphasized. They are advised to take time to understand the family background of the children, because not all of them have an opportunity to be provided with spiritual nourishment at home, and if they are, it is not done regularly or to the expectation of the teachers.

Sunday school teachers are encouraged to feel free to discuss with the parents how they are doing as far as their children's spiritual lives are concerned. There should be cooperation between Sunday school teachers and parents, making sure the children's spiritual needs are taken care of.

Prayer was mentioned as the common item that parents teach their children. Because of this, teachers and parents are encouraged to provide many opportunities for children to pray such as asking them to pray in their Sunday school classes. There should be an opportunity of exercising what the children know at home and in church.

Lack of time, inconsistency, forgetfulness, and the feeling of inadequacy were found to be the biggest hindrances parents face in nurturing their children spiritually. There is a need, therefore, for parents to understand that the spiritual nurturing of their children is God-given responsibility to them. Therefore, it should never be neglected or taken for granted.

Recommendation for Further Study

The following are the recommendations for further research:

There is a need for a study to be done to discover how preteens perceive their parents' involvement in their own (preteens) spiritual development.

This study dealt with parents and their children in an urban church; there is a need to explore the perception of parents in their involvement in the spiritual nurturing of their children in a rural setting.

A number of the children between six and twelve years old attend KFMC. However, their parents attend other churches, and they are not members of KFMC, hence a need to study whether or not these parents still provide the spiritual nurture for their children, even though they do not attend the same church.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

LETTER OF ENTRY



NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

P.O. Box 24685 - 00502 Karen, NAIROBI, KENYA

Tel: 254 (020) 7 882104/5 882038

Fax: 254 (020) 882008

Email: info@negst.edu

Website: www.negst.edu

16th January, 2006

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

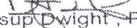
Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: RESEARCH WORK

The bearer of this letter, Miss. Uyambaje Therese Goletti is a student at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST) and is doing research towards the completion of the Master of Christian Education Degree. The research is on **"The Perception of parents of their Involvement in the Spiritual Nurture of their Pre-teen Children at Karinde Free Methodist Church"**.

Any assistance that you can give to Miss Goletti will be much appreciated.

Sincerely,


Jessup Dwight, PhD

Ag. Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS GUIDE

1. Why would you say it is necessary for children of this age to be spiritually nurtured?
2. As a parent what part do you play in the spiritual nurture of your children?
3. What are some of the things you do to help your children grow spiritually?
4. How often do you deliberately initiate the ways of spiritual nurture of your children?
5. What do you perceive as the factors that hinder you from being involved in the spiritual development of your children?
6. As a parent, what do you think is the motivating factor to encourage you in nurturing your children spiritually?
7. What would you recommend for other parents in the church?

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The title of the study: Parents' perceptions of their involvement in the spiritual nurture of their children at Karinde Free Methodist Church

The focus of the study: This study seeks to explore parents' understanding of the Biblical teachings and their application of the same and the factors that hinder parents' full involvement in the spiritual nurture of their children of ages six to twelve. The researcher is pursuing a Master of Divinity in Christian education at NEGST.

Procedures: The researcher intends to interview six parents who fellowship with Karinde Free Methodist Church to understand their perceptions on their involvement in the nurturing their children spiritually. One interview will take one hour per participant.

Significance of the study: this study will enhance knowledge on the impact parents have on the spiritual development of their children. It will shed more light on the ways parents can be fully involved more in the nurturing of their children. It will also provide insights for the church on how to sensitize and encourage parents concerning their roles and involvement in nurturing the spiritual lives of their children.

Confidentiality: Confidence in this study is promised. Only the researcher will go through the transcript of the information given by the participants. Your names will appear nowhere in the research, only the word participant will be used.

Appreciation: Thanks very much for your willingness to participate in this study. In case of any question, would you please feel free to contact the researcher on the telephone no: 0720 24 88 86 or email:

therese.uyambaje@negst.edu

Uyambaje Therese, the researcher, NEGST

APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

| Participants | Marital status | Number of children between 6 to 12 years of age |
|---------------|----------------|--|
| Participant 1 | Married | 2 |
| Participant 2 | Married | 2 |
| Participant 3 | Married | 2 |
| Participant 4 | Married | 1 |
| Participant 5 | Married | 2 |
| Participant 6 | Single parent | 2 |