

NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

EXPLORATION OF FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE
THE SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF UNMARRIED
SINGLE MOTHERS IN A LOCAL CHURCH

BY
RACHEL MUTAI

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

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July, 2004

Student's Declaration

**EXPLORATION OF FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE SPIRITUAL
DEVELOPMENT OF UNMARRIED SINGLE MOTHERS IN A LOCAL
CHURCH**

I declare that this study 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)



Rachel C. Mutai

July, 2004

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Unmarried Single Mothers and develop a theory of the factors that influence the perception of their spiritual development. Interviews were carried out with nine unmarried single mothers who are members of a local church. Observations as well as participations were also done with the group as they met for church activities and fellowship meetings.

The key factor that emerged was what the researcher has termed as the "revolutionary point" whereby the unmarried single mother comes to a point in time where she experiences freedom from her inner struggles and past experiences. At that point of time, a realization is reached and with a conviction within, leading to a turning point which results in a positive self-perception and interpretation of people's perceptions of her. Secondary to the revolutionary point was the support systems, which the research showed paved the way to the revolutionary point or strengthened the results of the revolutionary point experience. The two factors, revolutionary point and support systems, had an impact in the way that the single mother responded to life challenges and the perception of others as well as her own perceptions. One's daily experiences, as an individual or as she interacted with the society were explored.

From the findings, recommendations were suggested in developing an understanding of the needs of the unmarried single mothers and helping them to grow spiritually to reach the potential that God requires of them as members of the body of Christ. At the same time calling on them to a life of purity and integrity as they seek to be nurtured spiritually.

DEDICATION

The body of Christ that values the individual believer's growth into the likeness of Christ and their preservation in the word of truth for the Kingdom of God.

The single mothers who are genuinely seeking the righteousness of the Lord and committed to live to fulfill his purposes.

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I am most grateful to God for his enablement at all times in the course of this study. In him are wisdom and strength and ever sufficient grace.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The church as a body of Christ has been given the mandate of reaching all creation with the good news. In addition to proclaiming the word, the church in her teaching is suppose to ground the believers in the word of God thsat they can be faithful followers of Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 4:12-13 ministry is meant "to prepare God's people for the works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (NIV). The Church has a mission to fulfill not only in proclaiming the word of God, but also in nurturing those who already confess Christ. Every believer is to grow in the knowledge of the creator and to be brought to the likeness of Christ. Growth takes place in the intellectual and experiential aspects of a believer. All members of Christ's body, the Church, are to be built up and brought to maturity, including those often marginalized by society. Unmarried Single Mothers tend to be among those who are marginalized. The word of God, as the inspired word, should find the fulfillment of its functions, "teaching, disciplining, correcting and training in righteousness so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3: 16-17, NIV), in the lives of all believers. Hence, there should be no exceptions concerning who the Church is to reach and nurture in the word of truth.

Statement of the Problem

Singles fall into various categories: not yet married (with or without children), divorced, separated, and widowed. Mbogo (2003, 5) expanded on these categories to include: singles out of choice, calling or circumstances beyond their control; singles with children, but have never married who possibly expected but their partners denied responsibility or are still expecting marriage; single parents who have children out of choice and are not interested in marriage, singles who were once in informal co-habiting relationships that did not work out.

There are two categories of pregnancies: wanted and unwanted. There are single women, who when they are nearing menopause, have a child by natural or artificial method for various reasons. For some that is done in order to have someone to take care of them in their old age or someone to inherit their property (Gangel and Wilhoit 1993, 243).

An increasing number of Unmarried Single Mothers (USM) are self-identified Christians. While their needs are enormous, people's attitude towards them varies. USMs also have perceptions about themselves socially, physically, financially and spiritually. This study explored the "spiritual development" experiences of USMs as individuals and as they interacted with the believing community. The research explored ways the spiritual needs of the USMs had been met as well as the role the believing community played in meeting those needs. The study investigated the responsibilities given to USMs within the Christian community (or its expression in a particular locale). Creswell (1998, 94) saw research as leading to a "better understanding of the way things appear to someone else and through that insight lead to improvements in practice." This study of the spiritual growth of the USMs was undertaken with a view to enhancing effectiveness in ministering to and nurturing the

USM in order that their full potential might be realized.

The USMs seek and need spiritual guidance. To better understand how to minister to them, it is important to have a theoretical framework for understanding their perception of their spiritual journey. Hence, this study demanded a broad perspective and an open mind in order to appreciate USMs' experiences.

Significance of the Study

1. This study seeks to articulate the needs of USMs, thereby sensitizing local congregations to the importance of USMs' spiritual development needs. An understanding of the USMs' spiritual development enables a ministerial team to deal with the shortcomings and allow them to bring this particular group to maturity in Christ.
2. The study provides understanding of the contributions USMs can make to the ministry in the local church in carrying out the great commission through the exercise of their spiritual gifts.
3. The study describes the experiences of single parenting with the intention of sensitizing those contemplating single parenthood of issues likely to be faced. This study allows for a rethinking of the expectations of a family in light of God's intentions.
4. The study exposes the perception held towards the USMs. An understanding of the USMs experiences allows for the provision of an environment conducive for growth.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the factors that influenced the USMs' perception of their spiritual development. It considered their experiences individually and as they interacted with the society. Hence, it was necessary to understand the circumstances surrounding the USMs' perception of what promotes or hinders their spiritual development. Data were collected through interviews and by the researchers' participation in the fellowship meetings and the church ministry of the USMs.

Research Questions

From the stated research problem, the following research questions were raised:

1. How do USM describe their process of spiritual growth?
2. What do the USM perceive as helping or hindering their spiritual nurture?
3. How do USM perceive the role of the believing community, for good or evil, in their spiritual development?
4. How does an understanding of USM help foster, more effectively, their spiritual development?

Limitations and Delimitations

This study was limited to the Ziwani African Inland Church, but could potentially be useful to other urban and rural contexts. The researcher had anticipated a wide age range of USM but the data collected were limited to the middle aged unmarried mothers.

The sensitivity of the questions explored also limited this study. There could be issues participants considered too personal to share and refrained from talking about them.

The study was confined to the Unmarried Single Mothers because, as Gangel and Wilhoit (193, 243) observed that the unmarried single parents group is almost females. This does not mean single fathers do not exist, but the study dealt exclusively with mothers, because they generally end up assuming the responsibility for single parenting.

Definition of Terms

Coding – an analytical process whereby data is fractured, conceptualized, and integrated to form a theory.

Development - change can either be inward or outward, the study used the term to refer to change that resulted from an inward change.

Inlook and Outlook - refers to the self-perception and the interpretation of the perception of others respectively.

Participant/ Respondents – these two terms are used interchangeably to refer to the research population chosen for study.

Revolutionary point - a particular instance in life where a realization takes place and conviction of inner conflicts occurs leading to a turning point that leaves the person changed.

Singles - is used for those who in their status are not legally bound to a male/female in their lives whom they would consider as a husband/wife.

Spirituality – Richards' definition is adopted, i.e., spirituality is "living a human life in union with God" (1987, 67). Christian spirituality calls on everyone to live responsibly and accountably in union with God.

Spiritual disciplines - spiritual practices that open people to God's work in their lives. Foster called them "the way of disciplined grace" (1978, 6). They are not laws, but

means that have divine and human perspectives. The three major categories of spiritual disciplines are the inward, outward, and corporate disciplines.

Spiritual formation - choosing to live for Christ, which entails being molded.

Unmarried single mothers - are classified as mothers, who in one way or another, have a child or children but are not legally or illegally staying with the father of the children or with one whom the mother can refer to as her husband. (USM shall be used in this study).

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

This section availed to the researcher the various research methods. The methodological literature that dealt with the qualitative paradigm, the grounded theory tradition and the research procedures that this study undertook were discussed.

Research Paradigms

The two paradigms, qualitative and quantitative, have distinct differences. Mugenda and Mugenda (1999, 155) saw quantitative research as including "designs, techniques and measures that produce discreet or quantifiable data." Examples of designs for the quantitative research include experimental, causal-comparative, and co-relational. On the other hand qualitative research "includes designs, techniques and measures that do not produce discrete numerical data" (Ibid.). Words are being used and that these words are grouped into categories. Creswell (1998, 15), defining qualitative research in positive terms, wrote it as "an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem." He added, "the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, details views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting." The differences between the quantitative and qualitative paradigms are seen in the following dimensions: purpose of the study, focus of the study, viewpoint, values, reality (stable or dynamic), orientation, instrumentation, conditions, coding of data, data analysis, results and research reports (Mugenda and Mugenda 1999, 204). The key difference pointed out by Creswell (1998, 15) was that in quantitative research a

few variables and many cases are used while in qualitative research, researchers use a few cases and many variables.

Creswell (1994, 8) presented criteria for the adoption of a research paradigm or approach. The factors include: the researcher's worldview, the researcher's training or experience, the nature of the research problem, the researcher's tolerance of ambiguity, and the audience for the study.

Qualitative Traditions

The qualitative paradigm presents at least five traditions: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study. A biography focuses on the study of the life of an individual in terms of the individual's life history, events in his or her life, interpretation of the meaning of the events chosen and also the lesson learned from the study. A phenomenology focuses on understanding 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. An ethnography describes and interpretes a cultural or people group or system. Patterns of behavior, customs and the lifestyles of the people are studied. A case study focuses on a specific case. A bounded system or case is explored over time to get information in context. A grounded theory focuses on developing a theory from the studied phenomenon (15).

Grounded Theory

Of the five traditions discussed by Creswell, the researcher employed the grounded theory approach and, as Creswell puts it, "the intent of a grounded study is to generate or discover a theory, an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon that

relates to a particular situation." Creswell quoting Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, in 1967 pointed out that theories should be "grounded in data from the field, especially in the actions, interactions, and social process of people." 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).

The researcher looked into the spiritual development of USM pursuing the factors that influence their perception of their spiritual growth. The researcher chose to do a grounded theory because there were no written materials addressing the subject of spiritual development among the USM, especially in the African context. Secondly, to achieve detailed information, the participants needed to narrate their experiences of their spiritual journey. There would be other unmarried mothers elsewhere, but the researcher chose to work with a small group.

Data Collection

In qualitative research, methods used to collect data include direct observation, participant observation and interviews. One of the characteristics mentioned by Borg and Gall (1989, 240) was that in this approach, the researcher "plays a more central role in the elucidation and interpretation of the behaviors observed." Open-ended or semi-structured interviews are used in data collection. As for the grounded theory tradition, the major method for collecting data is through interviews. As Mugenda and Mugenda have put it, "the interviewer asks questions or makes comments intended to lead the respondent towards giving data to meet the study objectives" (1999, 86). Another advantage mentioned by Best and Kahn (1989, 201) is that the interviewer may stimulate the participants in his or her experiences, thus exploring significant areas not anticipated.

The Role of Substantiative Literature Review

In the quantitative research tradition, the purpose of a literature review is to determine what already has been done in relationship to the research problem being studied. However, the qualitative paradigm sees the literature review differently. The orientation of a qualitative approach is for the purpose of discovery since it is an inductive study. The development or generation of a theory in grounded theory is grounded in the data collected from the field, thus the literature serves comparison and contrasting purposes. Strauss and Corbin (1998, 49) argued that it is not possible to know "what the salient problems will be or what theoretical concepts will emerge" before an investigation is done. They advised that there is no need to review all the literature. Thus the literature review, if done at the initial stages, is for the purpose of enhancing sensitivity in framing the study, in generating questions to ask the participants, and in extending an already existing theory. The substantiative literature review or "technical literature" as Strauss and Corbin (1998, 51) put it, serves a secondary purpose in the grounded theory tradition.

The Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is the leading instrument for collecting data. Since the research is carried out in a natural setting, the researcher gathers words or pictures, analyzing them inductively, focusing on the meaning of informants and describing a process that is expressive and persuasive in language (Creswell 1998, 14). Interview questions are merely a guide, meaning that the researcher must adapt the questions depending on the direction of the interviews. At the same time, the researcher is free to ask for clarifications in the process of the interviews.

Sampling

The research 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. The participants selected are those with the ability to provide the information needed and helpful to the study. The informants are hand picked because they are informative and they possess the required characteristics. In the grounded theory, Creswell (1998, 118) calls the strategy theoretical sampling, where the people chosen contribute to the evolving theory. A number ranging from 20 to 30 participants has been suggested by Creswell, though suggested that when the saturational level has been reached, then the interviewing may stop. Theoretical saturation happens when the researcher cannot find any new codes or dimensions emerging in the process of analyzing the data (Strauss & Corbin 1998, 158).

Data Analysis

Mugenda and Mugenda (1999, 202) showed how data analysis is the bringing of order to the information collected. In qualitative research, data analysis "seeks to make general statements on how categories or themes of data are related" (203). The collection of data and its analysis are done simultaneously as far as qualitative research is concerned.

In grounded theory data should be analyzed as soon as they have been collected. The process involved includes, reading through the transcribed material, and making notes along the margins as is necessary in search for initial codes. Strauss and Corbin (1998, 121) have suggested three types of coding: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Open coding involves looking for categories from the data collected. Strauss and Corbin (1998, 121) put it as "conceptualizing, defining

and developing categories in terms of their properties and dimensions. There are different ways of doing open coding: analyzing sentence by sentence; a whole paragraph; or perusing the entire document to know what is going on.

Axial coding involves "relating categories to their subcategories" (Creswell 1998, 151). A researcher comes up with what Creswell has termed coding paradigm or a theoretical model that shows the interrelationship of the categories of information. Various conditions are looked into in terms of context, consequences, causal or strategies for addressing the concept. The axial analysis is important because the researcher is building a theory.

Selective coding is the "process of integrating and refining the theory" (Strauss and Corbin 1998, 161). Categories are organized around a central phenomenon to see their relationships. Telling or writing a storyline, using diagrams, sorting and reviewing memos, and computer programs can be utilized in the integration process. The process of memoing involves "the researcher's record of analysis, thoughts, interpretations, questions, and directions for further data collection" (Strauss and Corbin 1998, 110).

Validation/Verification

Reliability and validity are essential to the gathering of data. While reliability is the degree of consistency that the instrument or procedure demonstrates, in validity the quality of the instrument or procedure for data collection is achieved. The definitions here seem general, but each type of data-gathering procedure exists. For a qualitative study where interviews are used, effectiveness is in establishing rapport so that the significant information needed is elicited (Best and Kahn, 1989, 203).

Verification for the grounded theory research is in the hands of the researcher and it employs a variety of ways. It can be done at different stages in conducting research. Raising questions to the categories formed, of which answers are to be found in the data, can also be used. The questions are raised after the open and axial codings have been done. The participants can also be used to verify the theory that has emerged. Strauss and Corbin (1998, 269) have developed a criterion in judging the quality of the study which is given under the procedures for the verification, which will be used in this study.

Research Procedures

This study employed a grounded theory tradition. It is necessary to give the specific methodological procedures that were followed in exploring the experiences of USM as they sought to grow spiritually.

Entry

The researcher, aided by a letter from the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology Academic office, sought permission from the Ziwani AIC to carry out the study. The researcher visited the church to develop relationships with the USMs, as they came for their fellowship and also during the Sunday services. Visits were made to some of the homes of the respondents. The researcher also visited the site and took part in the USMs' activities such as cooking for the sake of gaining rapport so that when the time to disclose the information needed, a relationship had already been developed. It was important that the participants trusted the researcher due to the sensitivity of the topic.

Participants

Since theoretical sampling was used, the researcher hand-picked nine women based on their ability to give the needed information. The group that was willing to give information was the middle-aged adults. The group thus, did not include adolescents or teenage mothers as had been anticipated. As Creswell (1998, 114) asserted, "the participants need to be individuals who have taken an action or participated in a process that is central to the grounded theory." The participants had between one to four children. Some of the participants' children were married, others were still in school and so under the care of the participants.

The researcher shared with the participants the purpose of the study and each participant's consent was sought. The informed consent form was presented though none signed. All the participants were residing in Nairobi and the researcher met some of them in the church and others in their homes.

Data Collection

In exploring the experiences of the USMs, the researcher primarily used interviews to collect the data. Semi-structured qualitative interviews and observations were conducted with nine USMs in the church. The locale was chosen because the researcher intended to get the experiences of those in the church setting and interacting with a believing community yet residing in different parts of Nairobi. As Creswell (1998, 111) stated the advantage of the individual not located at a single site is that "they can provide important contextual information useful in the axial coding phase of research."

Semi-structured interview questions also called an "interview guide" were formulated to answer the research questions. Interviews were conducted once with a

group of four women and later a follow up was done with women who were very productive in giving the needed information. The other interviews were done on a one-to-one basis. The researcher tried as much as possible to be casual and friendly during the interviews. The researcher went over the purpose of the study with each informant and assured the informant of the confidentiality of the information. The researcher made audio recordings of the interview sessions. In the process of the interview, the researcher also wrote down important points on a piece of paper, at the same time ensuring that the researcher did not lose track with the participant.

In addition to interviews, observations were made. The researcher participated in the USMs fellowship meetings called Singles Mothers Fellowship. In one of the fellowship meetings, the researcher was given an opportunity to speak to them. On one occasion, when the fellowship members were involved in the cooking activity for the church, the researcher took part in it. The researcher also saw the photo album of one of the respondents, which was incisive.

Pilot-Testing

The researcher used the interview guide with two USMs. One was picked from a church in Nairobi to represent those in the church setting and the other was from a rural setting. In doing a qualitative research a pilot test is used to reduce researcher subjectivity and to seek to know areas where the interview is repetitive or needing further clarification (Weiss 1994, 48). The pre-test showed areas the researcher needed to clarify to the respondents and questions that needed to be pursued further. The pre-test also helped the researcher to discover the best approach in dealing with the participants.

Data Analysis

Since coding and organizing of information into themes and concepts was expected in the analysis, the interviews were first transcribed. The procedure of analysis, therefore, began with open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The researcher began the initial stage of coding as soon as each interview was transcribed while still carrying out other interviews.

In open coding the researcher examined the transcribed notes forming categories of the information. The researcher read through the text, making necessary margin notes. Memos were written at the margins and as Strauss and Corbin (1998, 110) described, these are a researcher's "record of analysis, thoughts, interpretations, and directions for further data collection." Memo writing showed areas for specific concentration during the interviews. Open coding involved looking for comparisons in search for representation of the categories. As Creswell put it, 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 factors the USMs perceived as influencing their spiritual development, issues that the USMs struggled with, the kind of people they interacted with and the events they engaged themselves.

The second step was the axial coding where the researcher identified a single category as the central phenomenon of interest and explored the interrelationship of it to other categories. Factors looked into included causal conditions, strategies, context, intervening conditions and consequences. A theoretical model or a coding paradigm portraying the interrelationship of the categories of information emerged. A diagram that showed how information related to the central phenomenon was drawn.

The third step was the selective coding. Searching for confirming and

disconfirming examples from the experiences narrated by the USMs validated the relationships that emerged during the axial coding. Further refinement and development of categories was done. The researcher then wrote a theory that connected the major category with the subcategories (Creswell 1998, 150, 302). Analysis was done until theoretical saturation was achieved. This was when codes and categories were sorted, compared, and contrasted until no new codes or categories were produced.

Verification

The study employed the criteria put forward by Strauss and Corbin (1998, 269). To the process of research and grounding, the following questions were used:

1. How was the original sample selected? On what grounds?
2. What major categories emerged?
3. What were some of the events, incidents, actions, and (indicators) that pointed to some of these major categories?
4. On the basis of what categories did theoretical sampling proceed? Guide data collection? Was it representative of the categories?
5. What were some of the propositions pertaining to conceptual relations and what grounds were they formulated and tested?
6. Were there instances when propositions did not hold up against what was actually seen?
7. How and why was the core category selected (sudden, gradual, difficult, easy)?

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

This section discusses the findings from the interviews and observations made among the unmarried mothers in a local church. The group that met at AIC Ziwani called themselves Single Mothers Fellowship, thus the term used in the research findings was that of single mothers. The data analysis, using the procedure discussed in chapter two, generated the following theory.

Theory

The single mothers in the church shared several common experiences and life challenges. Their spiritual development was influenced primarily by the "revolutionary point," which was aided or/and strengthened by support systems. These two factors determined single mothers' individual inlook and outlook, as well as their response to life challenges.

The "revolutionary point" took place when a single mother was convicted of her internal, emotional, spiritual and psychological conflicts, and made a conscious turnabout, which left her a changed person. Enlightenment from scripture, deliverance, positive influences of people, prayer and fasting were the elements, which had brought about the revolutionary point. Those who had had a revolutionary point and had a strong support system showed a positive response to the life challenges and a healthy perception of themselves (inlook) and others (outlook). On the other hand, those who had not experienced a revolutionary point, whether or not they had a support system evidenced a negative inlook and outlook and responded

negatively to life's challenges. Hence, regression and stagnation appeared to characterize their spiritual development.

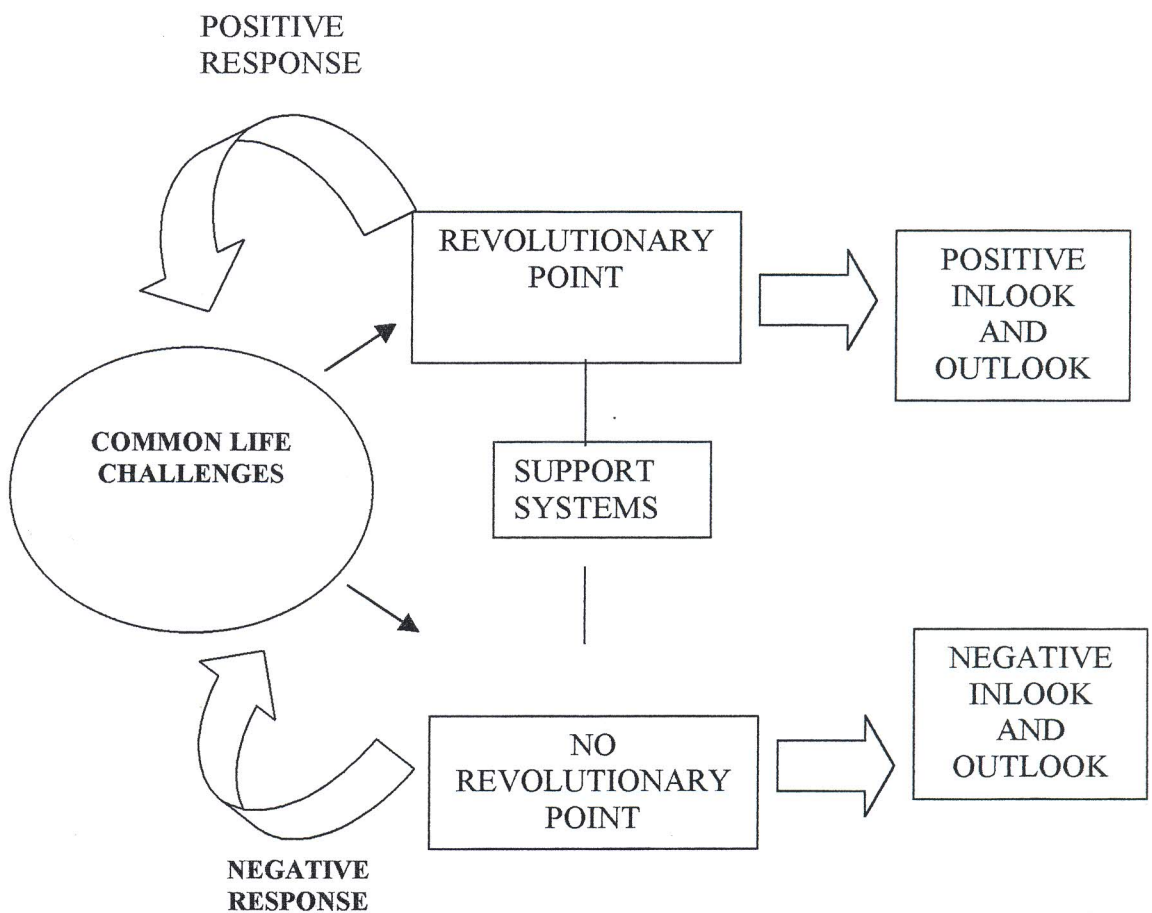
Relationship between Revolutionary Point and Support Systems

The revolutionary point emerged as the key factor to understanding spiritual development. The revolutionary point could take place with or without the influence of support systems. The support systems that the respondents mentioned included fellowship in places of work, trusted friends, women's Bible study groups, family members, partially from pastors' families, and mostly the Single Mothers' Fellowship. The systems, therefore, served as the eye opener whereby the single mother, as she interacted with members of a support system, realized that she had been struggling with inner conflicts, which could be resolved. Speaking of support systems one respondent said, "I had other fellowships apart from the one in church. The pastor who was here before lived with me in the same estate and we had a strong fellowship with his family. At my place of work we had a strong fellowship, interdenominational, and also we had a small group and I used to attend them." The different people in her life gave encouragement and counseled with her. That was why she remained strong in the faith through difficult times that she encountered, especially so as she narrated that initially her experience was of the most trying moments.

One respondent went on a retreat to pray and fast for five days with a group of three friends. One day when the group was praying God spoke through one of the friends telling the single mother that God was healing her heart and family. At the same time the support systems acted as a catalyst which sped up the dawning process that led to the revolutionary point for this single mother. At that point she broke off from the vices of unforgiveness, rejection, lack of self-acceptance, bitterness and

others. Support systems, therefore, were secondary yet important in understanding spiritual development. It was noted that, despite the presence of the support systems, without the revolutionary point some respondents did not demonstrate spiritual development in terms of how they responded to their life challenges nor were their outlook and inlook perceptions positive.

Figure 3.1: Influences of the Revolutionary Point and Support Systems



Elements of the Revolutionary Point and their Outcome

Some respondents experienced salvation in their childhood days, others when they were teenagers and others in adulthood as single mothers. Several did confess

that their sins had been forgiven and that they were children of God. One of the respondents mentioned that there was no way that as Unmarried Mothers, they could talk of spiritual development before they knew who they were and more so in receiving Christ. "Holiness and living pure lives" are some terms that were used to explain the importance of accepting Christ and walking with Him. One of the respondents, who was once a leader of the group said, "I would say the problem is the nurturing, spiritual nurturing," Other phrases that suggested salvation was very necessary to spiritual development came out:

"If you deal with them you talk to them about salvation."

"They need the Holy Spirit to work in them, to transform them."

"I had gotten saved here but I was not growing until I identified myself with people like them and they brought me up spiritually."

" Yes, to walk in holiness, for sure if they walk in holiness, God will be by their side. But the problem is when they are in problem they compromise."

In one of the fellowship meetings the researcher attended, testimonies were shared of the way the respondents were saved and became the children of God. The Single Mothers came to receive Christ in various ways. From the experiences narrated, some of the mothers grew up in Christian or religious homes, and this had an impact in their later stages of life, though some did not confess Christ at that time.

Despite accepting Christ, some respondents still struggled with bitterness, unforgiveness, lack of self-acceptance, pain, hatred, and blaming of others as well as God. In the midst of the turmoil, some respondents realized that, though they confessed to be Christians, they were still entangled with things that were not right. Some did not even know that they were still bound by such vices as unforgiveness. For others it was evident, but it was hard to let it go. That particular point, which the

researcher terms as a revolutionary point, marked a beginning of a different kind of perspective towards self and others and their approach to life challenges. The revolutionary point was reached in various ways as narrated by the respondents. For some it began with circumstances that triggered the memory of past experiences, utter helplessness or dissatisfaction with one's life. Respondents narrated circumstances that lead to the revolutionary point. Positive influences of people, deliverance, enlightenment from scripture, and engagement in some spiritual disciplines were given as preparatory to the revolutionary point. The events leading to the revolutionary point were gradual or instant. In one way or another, they led to an inner conviction, which then took an important turn when a revolutionary point was reached or achieved.

Positive influences of other people

One respondent narrated her experience, "I used to go to church, but I knew that I was not a Christian. My mother used to share the word of God with me and encourage me." After her conversion, one day she woke up and decided she was going to live a different life, and that was the way her life was changed. There is the revolutionary point that when reached, changed one's life. At that point, the single mother allowed Christ to change her life. Her perspective towards life challenges became different. She confessed that she used to have a lot of money but was finding it not enough. After the revolutionary point, she realized that even when she did not have anything, she still was at peace and contented. A respondent mentioned, "I am okay, when I need and I get little, I am satisfied with that, but before, I used to find myself not satisfied even though I was working and earning good money." Another respondent said, "I have learnt to be responsible and contented with what I have."

One other respondent who came to know the Lord through the witness of the pastor of the church had a different story. She mentioned that the word of God brought light to her and that if she knew before what she knows now, then life would have been different for her. She said, " when I attend the mid week fellowships it gives me to grow and to learn and I tell myself that if I knew these before I got saved it would have been helpful, but I find that I already past there. These are teachings that would have really helped me if there was someone to explain them to me". It was out of ignorance that she became a single mother, thinking that her problems would be solved. It was at that time that the word of God was preached to her. Later, when she was alone in her house, deep in thought, she realized that she was entangling herself with unnecessary things, trying to resolve her past life. She felt an inner strength leading her to arise and move, her eyes were opened and from then on she purposed to be different.

One respondent attributed her revolutionary point to the work of the church elders. She had backslidden and then came back to Christ, yet there were inner struggles with which she wrestled. Sometimes she would be remorseful, depressed, and had no peace although she went to church. One morning she woke up and decided to approach the church elders. After talking with them a realization came that left her with peace. She found the courage and felt the freedom to move on.

Deliverance

For some single mothers, it was deliverance that freed them from what was holding them from taking a new direction. A respondent of three children looked back to the day she was delivered and a sigh was noted in the conversation. She narrated,

A big change happened to me two years ago when I was delivered. There had

been times that I was totally distressed; I would even be finding myself forgetting what I was looking for. Even my body size has really improved since then. At least for now I have the peace of mind.

The revolutionary point brought about positive change not only spiritually, but also physically and emotionally. The researcher observed the respondent's album and the pictures taken before and after the deliverance. Those taken after the deliverance showed that changes had taken place in her life. Another respondent talked of asking the Lord to deliver her, set her free, and purify her heart. With the deliverance came freedom from guilt and ability to interact with people. One respondent attributed this renewal to the fact that Christ had changed her life and purified her heart, desires, and thoughts. She testified of peace that she had not experienced before.

Enlightenment from scripture

There were those who, in the process of reading scripture, which had become routine to them, saw the word of God from a different perspective. One of the respondents used to attend a Bible study, but in one of her devotional times she read this verse that says man is created in the created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Since separating with her husband, she had regarded men as "dogs" because of what her husband had done to her. She was convicted that in calling men dogs, she was calling God a dog. This realization broke her heart and she repented,

My sister, I cried to the God and asked God to forgive me because I have called you a dog and the people are not dogs. From that time I saw men as God's people. The spirit of God kept telling me this man your husband is created in the image of God, but the evil planted a seed and it is that that I need to go to my knees and root it.

From then on, something new had happened to her not only changing her perspective of people but also her view of life.

The Single Mothers' exposure to the truth influenced their relationship with

Christ. One respondent, who demonstrated knowledge of spiritual development and had been a single parent for thirteen years, lamented, "They are religious and they think they are all right. The church has not been able to address it in the right way. That is why they fear, because if you know the truth the truth will set you free. They need proper nurture that they may know what salvation is all about." There was a difference between Christianity and religion. Taking part in church rituals did not in any way change the heart unless the single mother confessed Christ and reached a revolutionary point, which generally happened to those who were in church and were conversing Christians.

Prayer and Fasting

Prayer was mentioned by the respondents as having been instrumental in their lives as Christians. In most cases individual prayer had been most practiced. One respondent was glad that at least with prayer one does not need a husband as a mediator. Another strongly said, "When you realize that you cannot make it alone, you have no human help, very fast turn to God trust him for every aspect of your life. You depend upon his word, many times, I like hearing what God has to say." For some, prayer alone was not enough. Fasting had to accompany the prayers. One respondent confessed she had heard about prayer and fasting, but she had never done it in her life. However once she did it was effective. As mentioned earlier, one other respondent found herself with three friends going for a retreat to pray and fast for five days. She mentioned that she wanted to hear God. From such respondents, one would sense a maturing single mother who engaged in spiritual disciplines for correct motives.

The research showed that there may have been prior information or

understanding of the inner conflicts of the single mother, but at a particular point when the dawning happened, life took another direction. The mothers resolved inner conflicts and sought reconciliation with affected or blamed parties. The revolutionary point was very important in the spiritual development, as those who had had the experience looked composed as they narrated their stories. Some of the respondents shared testimonies of having inner peace and contentment.

Elements of Support systems

The respondents in the church spoke well of how the fellowship had been of great help. The group that was founded in 1990 by the Christian Education worker chose to call itself Single Mothers Fellowship (SMF). The Christian Education worker got concerned with the ministry to various groups. She approached one of the women and together they started the group. In the beginning they had a two-day seminar in Machakos after which the Single Mothers' Fellowship (SMF) was begun. A retreat, organized was attended jointly by the widows, as well as the single mothers. The Single Mothers' Fellowship was different from the Widows Fellowship, in that the SMF consisted of mothers who were not staying with the father of the children or with the one whom they regarded as their husbands.

The fellowship demonstrated a strong leadership. Though initially the Christian education worker led the group, with time she soon handed the leadership to the single mothers themselves. The group had made a spiritual, moral, financial, and intellectual impact in the lives of the single mothers. The impact was noted also in the way that some participants expressed concern for the single mothers who had not joined the fellowship, noting the things that they were missing.

The respondents felt that the support system received through the fellowship

was tremendous. Some of the activities that they did that had drawn them closer to one another included reading the word of God, praying, and helping one another in spiritual, and physical matters. The single mothers bonded so easily because they shared the same responsibilities and were faced with almost the same challenges. The single mothers felt a sense of belonging and acceptance as a group. For some respondents who had poor relationships with their family members, being rejected as a single mother, found the SMF taking the place of their family. One respondent who looked at SMF as her family said,

I am grateful because in all, God has been with us. We usually meet, visit each other. When one is sick we pray together because we depend on each other. We have no support elsewhere, so when I am sick and I don't see my fellow single mothers come to see me, for they are the only ones I depend on, I wonder, but they usually come.

Another respondent, who had also found the group very supportive said, "It has really helped me, because when I am faced with a lot of things, when we come together I feel I am in the right place and I sense I have reached my potential. Even when we are two or three, we sing, read the word together and we thank God." The bond that the single mothers had as a group was very strong to the extent that when one was not present for the fellowship, they called the person to find out how she was doing. The motivational role that the fellowship played was evident from the response of one participant who had just moved from upcountry. With a sigh she said, "I find it helpful when they come together. Like for me here in Nairobi I have been encouraged in the fellowship, especially when I see elderly women who have managed this far, bringing up their children by themselves." For most single mothers raising children was seen as tremendous yet those who had grown up children in sharing their experiences were of great help to others.

The reports given by the chairlady in one of the meetings showed that she

knew the whereabouts of each member. The group was told of those who had not attended the fellowship meeting because they had traveled or were sick or had other commitments. The group members turned out to be accountable to one another though this was not done in great depth. The fact that they had visited each member and knew where each one lived brought about transparency and trustworthiness amongst them.

At one SMF meeting, the researcher observed one respondent attending the fellowship despite being very sick. In tears the respondent narrated how she knew that by coming to the meeting, she would find people to pray with her and encourage her. Indeed, the group spent time in prayer. Morally, the SMF supported one another by sharing their burdens and giving suggestions on how they could overcome what they were going through. Most of the respondents had teenagers and others adult children who were married. By sharing their experiences, they learned from one another. They considered themselves a family and the burdens of one were the burdens of all.

Financially the group had supported each other. Each time they met, they collected an offering. When someone had a need they gave what they had to help that person. If it was not enough they contributed more. Some of the respondents had children in school, and others needed assistance in paying medical bills, but the presence of one another made the difference in their attitude towards financial demands.

Other groups or individuals offered support. One respondent said, "The pastor's wife builds me up the most. The joy she shows me does not make me think that I am alone. It makes me feel that I am like other people. When I go and greet other women people are different in the way they talk." It was evident that support of

the single mothers did not necessarily mean only of material things. Spending time and talking with them brightened their hearts. One respondent who had been visited said,

I remember one time, when I was sick, a married woman visited me and advised me to continue taking medicine since I have been on medication for a long time.... The woman told me of the experience of her mother who has been on medication for a long time. I was encouraged to realize that I was not the only one, so I took courage. There are people with different diseases and must be on drugs. Then another lady friend also came to visit me. She encouraged me, that is the words. They did not give me money, but I was encouraged.

Some of the respondents, found themselves receiving the support from other single women. They shared many similarities including being alone, deciding how to spend their time and not seeing the unmarried mothers as a threat. One respondent mentioned having a single lady as a prayer partner. This was not in any way a source of insecurity to her.

The single mothers had received varied reactions from family members. Some parents had accepted them while others had faced hostility and were not on good terms with their parents, brothers or sisters. In the group with which the researcher dealt, all except one had moved away from their parental homes, leading their own lives and managing their own affairs. Some of the family members regarded single motherhood as a curse and did not associate with the single mother. Such reactions from the family members did affect the single mother. The respondents confessed that it was painful, yet the fact that they were Christians made them to still relate with their family members well.

The respondents, when asked whether they had ever had a mentor or a discipler since they had been saved, often responded in the negative. One respondent said that she never had a mentor and feared to have one because she did not trust

people. Incidences of mistrust were narrated,

As a Christian you hesitate to tell anyone with fear that she might be like the other person and take the information to someone else. But in your heart you will be hurting, because it is like a gossip, but when you get into the word of God and you know that someone has helped you, instead of going to tell out, you seclude yourself, and pray alone.

For such a single mother, it takes a long time for them to accept support from other people. They become suspicious of anyone who gets close to them making mentorship difficult.

Another respondent had not had a mentor and had become discouraged by the fact that she felt she was investing in people's lives and yet was not receiving the same from other people. She felt she had been misused and therefore, withdrew from people. Another respondent had a mentor who turned out to be a lady who had been praying for the salvation of the single mother. The mentor took her in and nurtured her in the word of God and in her walk with the Lord. There was a difference that the researcher observed in the life of this respondent. She narrated her experiences with a lot of confidence, and her stand in Christ was evident in her general outlook on life, her commitment to the work of God, how she handled issues and how she related to people. Commitment to a mentor- mentoree relationship was demanding and it entailed not only one's moral and spiritual support, but also the willingness to put time into the relationship. A relationship could not be built unless the parties trusted each other and were willing to make sacrifices.

Support systems were stronger where commonalities were many. That was why those in the SMF bonded so easily and more intimately than they did with single or married women in the Bible study. The support system offered a sense of belonging and acceptance.

Outcome of Revolutionary Point and Support Systems in Relation to Individual Inlook and Outlook

Several descriptions and interpretations came out of relating to the single mother as an individual. The single mothers wrestled with varied issues including those that were theological, personal, and situational in nature.

Theological Interpretations of the Inlook and Outlook

Interpretations that were theological in nature came up as one single mother asked herself, "Why it had to be me who is a mother and unmarried?" One of the respondents had become a Christian in her childhood and lived a Christian life until she was a youth. She confessed that it took her a long time to accept the fact that she had let go of what she had treasured for so long. The question that she raised was, "Why did God let it happen to me?" Another single mother did not blame God, but rather the devil. The way that the respondents dealt with such theological issues was to look for biblical characters or scriptures that tended to support their view. One respondent, looking at her own situation, mentioned the story of Job and how God allowed Satan to tempt him though Job had not done anything wrong. It was evident that such a respondent failed to see the fact that Job did not yield to the temptations of the devil. However, because Job suffered she identified her sufferings with those of Job. Another respondent looked at the story of the Samaritan woman and noted that she admitted that she was a sinner and needed to change. The story gave her the motivation to go to church despite the negative reactions received from the believing community. One other respondent said, "... then I remembered the words in the Bible where it says not all who call Lord, Lord shall inherit the Kingdom of God. I realized that temptations were also in church" In coming to terms with themselves, some single mothers used scripture not only to describe who they were,

but also to understand how people perceived them to be.

Positive Individual inlook and Outlook

One respondent approached the whole issue positively. When her husband walked out on her, she sat down and did a soul search. Having been a Christian, she remembered the passages in scripture that helped her go through that period of time.

During the interview, she commented,

What has helped me is that I accepted the things the way they were, and I also accepted that for us to separate, it is not wholly the mistake of my husband even if it was 80 %. I had the other which I had to accept was mine. When you are looking at the speck in your brother's eye, first remove the log in your eye. I had to ask myself, what about me? Did I lock him out? Did I complain?

Acceptance of self and their status, was crucial in dealing with single mothers as individuals and in cultivating the spirit of forgiveness. Most of the respondents did admit that it was hard to forgive themselves as well as those who had wronged them, yet with time they realized that the word of God teaches that unless we forgive others we cannot be forgiven. A few of them realized that they were unmarried single mothers due to their own mistakes. These did not find it hard to forgive. One respondent attributed her status to ignorance and described herself differently, "With the word of God and the teachings that I have received, I tell myself that if I knew these things before I got saved it would have been helpful, but I find that I already passed there." Another respondent who was saved when she was a single mother described herself as, " a mother of many children as I relate well with the youth and some see me as their mother. I see myself as a child of God." This respondent, after her conversion, had been convicted that she needed to change though she had been in church for quite sometimes. The above description that she gave of herself was a result of this change after her conversion.

The single mothers who had had a revolutionary point interpreted people's reactions differently. The respondents, as a result of the revolutionary point, continued with their church activities despite being mocked and called names. The negative reaction from people was perceived by the respondents, but they were determined and spoke of inner strength to persist in their daily activities in the midst of rejection and voluntary or involuntary exclusions. A respondent asserted, "I was encouraged and continued to read the Bible and together with my children go to church. I realized that as I continued to stay at home, the devil was bringing many traps then life would be more difficult. I told myself that I would rather focus on God. Its better to obey God." Another said, "What has helped is the way I have the interest and the urge and when I want to do something, I have the courage and go for it without fear what people think of me."

The power of words is important in the way the single mother saw herself. One respondent who had a revolutionary point experience pointed out, " Confess positively everything of your life and claim the promises of God that they are yours." The above respondent looked at herself in line with the truth in the word of God, not letting any voice work against what God has promised and the way God looked at her.

Negative Inlook and Outlook

The way a single mother looked at herself was important to the way that she approached life, and perceived other people and the events happening around her. After entering into the believing community, one of the respondents secluded herself, interpreted people's actions in her own way, and reacted negatively. In the beginning, most of the respondents did not have anything to do with people. After the Sunday service, they went home without even greeting people. Such reactions were triggered

by the way they looked at themselves. One respondent said, "There was a time I went to church, there I would feel I was not one of them. You feel very different from them. It happens that I do not have a friend even in church. Then it appears that they look at me as more sinful. I decided to stay with my sins at home as I pray to my God at home. So I stayed." This single mother was reacting to the nonverbal communication she saw around her. From her experiences, the respondent feared interacting with people, did not have a mentor and the researcher observed uneasiness as the respondent narrated her story.

Outcome of Revolutionary Point and Support Systems in Relation to their Response to Life challenges

A single mother found herself faced with different responsibilities, which in one way or another, influenced her spiritual development. The approach to life and the responsibilities the single mother had were important in molding or destroying her spiritually. After what was termed as "shattered dreams," the way in which a single mother picked up life and began again fostered or stagnated her life in Christ. The respondents mentioned several challenges that they experienced.

Description of Life Challenges

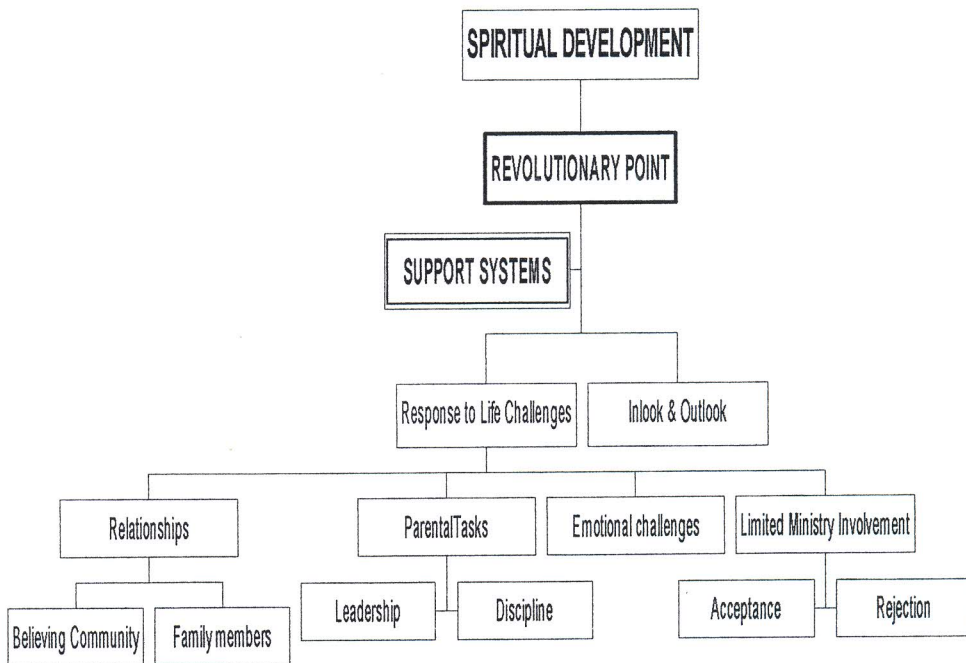
The single mother is faced with relational, parental, emotional, physical and ministerial responsibilities. Some come as a result of being a single mother, while others form part of the developmental tasks of an adult. As a parent, the single mother had a family to take care of, needing to provide for it materially, financially, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. The single mother had to be both a mother and a father to the children. The single mother interacted with people not only in her place of work, but also to her family members and the believing community.

Although being a single person, she could not live in solitude and in her quest for spiritual nurture she met people at church.

The emotional realities of loneliness, insecurity, and fear had to be faced as the respondents came to terms with their past experiences, lived in the present and envisioned their future. The respondents had to decide the future of their children as well as their own. Health problems for some respondents became a challenge, which had a bearing on the kind of work they did, and financial implications.

The single mother's response to life challenges related to the kind of support systems she had and whether or not she had experienced a revolutionary point. These influenced her spiritual growth.

Figure 3.2: How major factors influence spiritual Development



Response to the Life Challenges and their Outcomes

Parental Tasks

The single mother found herself as the head of the family, the breadwinner and

maker, decision-maker, and the disciplinarian among others. Those with teenagers showed discipline as a big challenge. Feelings of "what else do I do" would be heard from the respondents. One of them narrated with tears in her eyes,

I have a son who finished school last year, for him to come to church I have tried but I have been defeated. I just look at him. I have no ability, no one to help me. You look at him, you feel like crying. What else do you do? It becomes a battle. Sometimes he complains that mother, you do not love me, you love the other children. When I tell you anything you do not want to listen, until you feel he is a burden. So many things. I have been praying, praying. This far if I tell him to come to church, he says he does not feel like, that he has his own business. At such times you feel you need support. Support where will you get that? You have no husband, your brothers they do not know Christ, your parents are far away, your sisters, everyone has his own things to do. You look at yourself and remain there with you child. Such a child you have educated him, given him information, you have done all you would, he has finished form 4. After that, he does not come to church, he does not know God! You hurt inside your heart, mm, what will you do? No one to help you, even to pray for the children. There is no that time.

The respondent was very emotional and passionate as she narrated. Feelings of defeat were observed. At such instances the single mothers cried for support systems not only to encourage them, but also to provide skills needed in handling their children.

Some of the respondents had teenage girls who were also single mothers. The respondents did all they could to teach their children and warn them, yet mass media and bad company were blamed for destroying the morals of the young people.

Despite the struggles faced in single parenting, the occupation of the single mother and the number of children she had also played a significant part in the life of the single mother and her children. For example, one respondent had one child and did not mention that finances were a major challenge in her life. Another respondent who had had a good paying job did not complain much about her financial situation.

Leadership skills were a felt need of all the respondents. As the head of their families they needed practical skills that would help them carry out the roles of being

a "father" and a mother. One respondent asserted, "Another challenge is that of livehood. You are the father, you are the mother, you are everything and its not easy. You have to keep a family."

There were respondents who, despite the pressure of the parental responsibilities, had a positive attitude towards life. In their responses they confessed that it was Christ who had helped them.

Emotional Challenges

Loneliness was one aspect that was mentioned by the single mothers. One respondent felt lonely due to the actions of the people around her. In the church for example, when there were couples meetings, she was forced to go home and would feel lonely. The respondent saw the experience going even beyond loneliness into grief as the circumstances of what made her a single mother were dwelt upon. She said, "In your heart you ask yourself different questions." Inner conflicts were evident as the respondent kept to herself. The healing process would be difficult, as research showed that support systems provided avenues for self-expression.

Fear was mentioned in relation to emotional instability. In her response as to her involvement in church activities, one of the respondents mentioned fear of being misunderstood, taken advantage of, as well as lack of trust inhibited her from joining church activities. Trusting oneself was also a challenge mentioned by the same respondent. Another attitude given was that of regrets. One respondent, as she saw or thought of her children, painfully said, "Sometimes I do regret." As a result of shattered dreams, the single mother looked back to when things were different resulting in feelings of failure.

Feelings of utter helplessness were present. The researcher observed a mother

shedding tears in the process of narrating her story. To her the experience seemed very fresh in her mind and it was an experience that had left her with a responsibility of taking care of children, with greater responsibility when dealing with teenagers. The movement of hands was observed as the respondent showed helplessness. The support system of the Single Mothers Fellowship was in place, but the respondent did not show evidence of having experienced a revolutionary point thus resulting in intense emotions.

Bitterness was observed as well as was mentioned. The respondent who had been a single parent for thirteen years, spoke of her initial bitterness which later led to depression. The mothers who found themselves in situations where their husbands deserted them were bitter, yet one of them observed that harboring bitterness blocks breakthrough in prayers and also in forgiving and forgetting the persons involved. It was noted that after the revolutionary point, she let go of bitterness and she approached life in a positive way.

Relational Challenges

Relationship with Past Experiences

The single mothers approached their past experiences positively when they accepted the situation, and were willing to change, while for a few respondents, when there had been reconciliation with the people who had hurt them or who had walked out on them. The approach to their life challenges was negative when they still blamed other parties, were bitter, and lived a life of fear and remorse. One respondent who worked closely with the SMF commented,

I kept on encouraging the ones whose cases were like mine, who may feel very bitter with their husbands. They need to be counseled out of that. They need to be taught about forgiveness. There are those who have told me totally I can not go back to my husband. They know why and then they have already made up their minds. I encourage them to live alone because it could be

something that is very involving so much.

Another respondent told of how she had dealt with pain and unforgiveness that used to hinder her from growing in her spiritual life,

I prayed so hard that the Lord would deliver me and set me free and purify my heart inside me, because when you are saved you are encouraged to be clean in your heart, like the Samaritan woman who when she got saved, she became free. It makes me want to remove the pain, because that would take me back.

Freedom was experienced when one accepted the reality and forgave and let go of the pain whether it was self-inflicted or caused by others.

Relationship with Family Members

The single mothers are members of a family. All the respondents except one were staying away from their parents, brothers and sisters. The way that the single mothers perceived the reactions from the family members varied, yet those who had had a revolutionary point and a support group viewed relationships differently. They tried to understand their families and not view their negative reactions as a source of pain but as a concern for which to pray. Such respondents were very positive that their relationship with Christ made the difference. One respondent admitted, "You know when you have family members who are not saved it is more difficult, but when you are a Christian, your friends become your brothers and sister, and you take time to pray for your family." Another lamented, "There is so much hatred in the clan or, or parents, the family especially if you are a mother without a husband. At home my brothers will think my children will be given a piece of land there, so they are very careful. This brings a lot of trouble." The respondent was positive towards the family members and mentioned that she had supported her brother when in need without feeling any pain. To some who have received parental support, the brothers or sisters

accused the single mothers of being their parents' favorite.

One respondent did have a good relationship with family members. She narrated, "At home they still respect me and can listen to me. I can give suggestions or advice even to my sisters. My auntie one time found me talking to my sisters and she was amazed and commented that it was difficult for someone with children and not married to advice." Positive family relations alone did not necessarily mean that the single mother was growing spiritually. One respondent was remorseful even with strong family relations. When the revolutionary point had been experienced, then good family relationships created a conducive environment for growth. The remorseful respondent commented that, "The thought of my children as not having a father troubles me. I had never since growing up thought that I would ever have children without a father, (pause). Children without a father." To the respondent, it was evident that she had not come to terms with the reality and still struggled to accept the situation as it was without regret for what she had dreamed of achieving in life.

Relationship with the Believing community

The kind of reception given and observed by a single mother was significant in her quest and the meeting of her spiritual needs. Those who stereotyped unmarried single mothers as being in church for motives other than the need of spiritual nurture hindered that single mother's sense of acceptance.

Entry into the believing community played a role in the lives of the single mothers. Some were silently ignored, some were made to feel that they did not belong, and others found themselves misplaced in the Young Adults Fellowship, while some were happily received. Geographical location of the believing community

resulted in varying reactions of reception. One respondent who moved from a rural area to an urban area felt welcomed into a church even after the church realized she was a single mother. The same respondent had not at that time joined AIC Ziwani. The size of the church was a determining factor in the reception of the single mothers. In a small church the respondents mentioned that it was difficult to hide in the congregation. People would know who you are. If the church leadership thought, they needed the services of a single mother, they embraced her. In a big congregation, some single mothers had not been identified. The few who had come out, did so when they spoke up regarding their spiritual needs not having been met. As was observed, the single mothers needed to be strong and aggressive in seeking spiritual nurture especially in big congregations.

In the church there were ministries to many groups that could not be avoided. Couples meetings and seminars featured in the church program. Though not meant to intentionally leave out the single mothers, the groupings communicated a lot. There were times in which the church leadership had asked the single mothers to join the women's Bible study, however, the respondents noted that their reception to the group had been negative. The most important thing the respondents mentioned was that their needs were not being met when they were put together with the married mothers.

How did the single mothers respond to questions both from people and from their children? The fact the people did not understand the status and needs of the single mothers put the single mothers in a position in which they were misunderstood or stereotyped. One respondent strongly pointed out that there was a difference between saved single mothers and unsaved single mothers outside the believing community. The saved mentioned were stereotyped thus not been understood and taken seriously.

Limited Ministry involvement

There were limited ministry opportunities for single mothers. Some respondents did admit that their single motherhood status limited them in some ways, for there were ministry responsibilities that needed a couple. However they did minister in areas where they sensed no limitation. One respondent had found a ministry with fellow single mothers upcountry. She narrated, "There are times that when I have been home, some other single women have come to me and I have been able to talk with them. Sometimes they would wonder what wrong they have done to God. I usually encourage them not to lose hope in life." A positive response to limited ministry in terms of accepting the reality as it is, showed evidence of a revolutionary point experience.

There were respondents who seemed to be in conflict with church leadership in that they were not being given opportunity in ministry. Though they accepted their status as single mothers, they did not see that as a hindrance in what they could do in the ministry. As a fellowship in the church, one SMF leader admitted that they had become reluctant at some point and found themselves getting less involved.

The general church activities that were mentioned ranged from cooking, ushering, to singing in the choir. It was observed that the commitment of a single mother to the Lord and her obedience to the word of God, the level of acceptance of her status and related responsibilities, and her response to life challenges worked for or against her spiritual journey. The most important factor for her was to experience a revolutionary point, which changed her perception of herself, of others, and also her response to the kind of life responsibilities she had to fulfill.

Recommendations from the Single Mothers

The researcher gave opportunity to the single mothers to give their recommendations. The respondents spoke evangelistically not only to their fellow single mothers, who were not members of the fellowship, but also to the church leadership, members, their children and the young people.

To their fellow single mothers, they urged them to accept themselves and allow Christ to change them. As the respondents appreciated the Single Mothers' Fellowship, those not part of the fellowship were said to be missing a lot.

In regard to the church leadership, the single mothers did not see why they should be sidelined when it came to pastoral attention. The reception of the single mothers into the church had been negative causing the single mothers to question why they should be treated as though they did not belong to the body of Christ. Just as the church gave attention to other groups in the church, the single mothers also needed attention. The concern was not so much being given opportunities for ministry but for their spiritual needs to be met. Yet one of the respondents warned,

Especially for the church, these people (single mothers) need special attention. Because most of them shy away because they feel rejected, you will not reach them until you love them, you identify yourself with them. Some of them run into depression. These are sensitive people, a widow and a single mother, there are things that can provoke that person to run away from you or to hate you. Handle them with love. Bring them to your level and assure them that they are just normal people and that God loves them. Make them to be somebody because most of them reject themselves.

The single mothers continued with their recommendations as they encouraged young people to be cautious in what they thought, and did. They were warned that modernization was not the solution to life, neither was marriage all that life was about. The word of God should be allowed to shape the values and beliefs of the younger generation. Some of the respondents were open for others to learn from them.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND LITERATURE REVIEW INTEGRATION

This section discussed the research findings in light of the substantive literature review. The theory generated was discussed in terms of how it differed or was similar to that in the literature.

African scholars have used different names to refer to the category of mothers who have children but are not legally married or are not staying with the father of the children or one whom they can refer to as their husbands. Gichinga (2002) used the term "unmarried mothers," while Wachege (2003) used "African single mothers," which he differentiated from the mother widows whose husbands have died. The researcher preferred to use "unmarried single mothers" (USM) for the same category to capture the fact that they are not married and at the same time they are with a child or children. Since the respondents referred to themselves as single mothers, that was the term used for the analysis, but USM would be the preferred term.

Importance of the Study

Literature affirmed the findings that the rate of USM was increasing and, thus, needing attention not only from the society, but also from the church as noted in this research. Tham (2003, 12) noting on one-parent families in Singapore wrote that it was not a rarity as he looked at those women who had the sole responsibility of leading a family after being separated, deserted, divorced or widowed. Wachege (2003, 295) pointed out that the topic of single mothers at large has been touched on superficially or somehow ignored by the pastors, priests, social workers, ethicists and

moral theologians. The research findings as spoken out by the respondents showed that single motherhood was a reality that needed to be addressed. Gichinga (2002, 1), who was alarmed at the increasing figures of the girls who dropped out of school or colleges because of pregnancies, spoke out of the concern and attempted to discuss the causes of the problem.

Categories of Unmarried Single Mothers

While Wachege (2003) looked into categories of USM in the society, the researcher dealt with those who are in the body of Christ and have confessed Christ. The three categories of USM from the findings are those from broken marriages or had separated and the teenage mothers who never married but are now grown adults. Literature affirmed the existence of the three categories.

The Needs of Unmarried Single Mothers

Research findings showed varied needs of the USM, ranging from those related to them as individuals, as they related with people and those they encountered in carrying out the responsibilities of single parenting. Literature mostly discussed the needs of singles at large, and those of single parenting. From a relational perspective USM needed to feel a sense of bonding with another human spirit as discussed by Anthony (1992, 203). Peterson (1984, 164) pointed out that it is human nature to have someone to share joys and sorrows, discoveries, victories and defeats. Though he stated loneliness as the greatest disadvantage of being single, research findings from the USMs gave spiritual nurture as the core. The revolutionary point affected the perspective that a USM took in undertaking other tasks and in the self-perception and the perception of other people.

The Importance of Revolutionary Point

Evangelism of the USM

The gospel is preached to all humanity since human nature is in itself fallen. The findings showed that some of the USM came to know the Lord through the sharing of the gospel from pastors, relatives, or friends. Some of them had been in church before and on their own, unaided made the decision to receive Christ. Literature revealed that spiritual birth is essential in spiritual growth. Schaeffer (1983, 3) discussed in general terms of spirituality in the sense that true spirituality cannot be expected unless one is a Christian. Schaeffer discussed the physical birth analogy, which was also used by the USM. He brought out legalism as a hindrance, which reduces Christianity to a mechanical and external observance of taboos. The USM mentioned lack of spiritual birth and religiosity as the beginning point of the quest for spiritual nurture. Wachege (2003, 287) approaching it from a Roman Catholic perspective, affirmed a relationship with Christ in what he termed a "persistent conversion." In persistent conversion, he pointed out "relational, interpersonal, communal, ministering service and salvific consequences" (Wachege 2003, 302). True conversion must be inward with outward results. What the literature did not point out is the revolutionary point, which the research showed happened even after the spiritual birth. The USM shared testimonies of deliverance, prayer and fasting, which were instrumental in their revolutionary point experiences. The positive results of the revolutionary point experiences included the inner urge or inner strength shared by respondents as motivating into action and giving them the determination to continue despite the rejection that they faced as well as changing their perspectives towards life and its challenges.

Spiritual Development and the Use of Spiritual Disciplines Among the USM

Growth entails both the divine and the human nature. Richards (1987, 16) wrote that, "Christians need to cooperate with the urgencies of the Spirit of God, and remain committed in a discipline obedience to the biblical terms for growth in godliness." There is the intentional aspect of staying connected with Christ, which comes out in the values and the virtues of a Christian. Wilhoit and Dettoni (1995) and Richards (1987) discussed spiritual formation as applicable to all Christians, but the research dealt with USM. According to the findings USM engaged in prayer and fasting, reading of the word and fellowshiping with one another. The mostly used discipline was prayer. The concern was whether prayer was used because of the needs of USM or that the urge to commune with God continually existed? Findings showed that USM resorted to prayer since there was no one else to whom they could turn. A self-evaluation was needed in terms of the motives that USM have towards prayer. Richards (1987, 106) warned that prayer of the heart need to be established as a priority, and always practicing the presence of God. Prayer need not be need-based but an established discipline. By so doing spiritual growth is fostered.

Since spiritual development cannot be measured, Wilhoit and Dettoni's discussion can be applied to USM that in their spiritual lives they need to be disciples and that entails following Christ and emulating him. From the researcher's findings forgiveness, reconciliation, and an outgrowth of bitterness determined spiritual growth. These were especially noted in the inlook and outlook perceptions as well as in the response of the USM to the life challenges. Initially some USM blamed the parties responsible for causing them to be single mothers, until convicted otherwise either by scripture or counseling from others.

The USM cried for nurture, which showed the need for formation and exposure to more spiritual disciplines that they could be used to foster their growth. The unwed state can be a viable condition through which one may realize discipleship to Christ and fulfill her commitment to Christ.

Description of Self

Part of the process of spiritual formation observed involved developing a sense of true identity.

Our spirits are formed as we take in information about who we really are and as we begin living our lives on the basis of that identity. Christian spiritual formation is coming to the right answer to this question and then living our lives on the basis of that proper identity. (Gangel and Wilhoit 1994, 248)

Living in awareness that Jesus is present and being practical in following his leading influences our decision. The findings showed that the outlook and inlook that the USM had about themselves influenced their spiritual development. Those that saw themselves as the children of God and had accepted themselves and their status had a positive attitude toward themselves and their life challenges. On the other hand, those still fighting with fear, self-rejection, bitterness, regrets, and remorse had a problem that hindered spiritual growth.

Interpersonal Relationships

Research showed that USM had attracted varying reactions from people, which were fundamental in spiritual development. Wachege (2003, 224) wrote of "diverse and mixed feelings, judgements and contrasting reactions from various people, churches and educational disciplines and the society as a whole." Lack of sense of belonging or acceptance influences many areas in the life of a person. True

to the research findings, Steel (1990, 146) rightly observed that "once a level of belonging is achieved, however, it is time to search out all the aspects of one's faith." From identity arise fidelity, which is a sense of loyalty, and duty, and enables a person to achieve her or his potential. The USMs narrated experiences related to such virtues. The question was what role had the believing community played in the nurturing of the USM? For most USM the reaction from the church was negative--mockery, intentional isolation, suspicion, and stereotypes among others. In speaking of single mothers Wachege (2003, 228) described the reaction of the as "eagles, vultures" who are hawk-eyeing. Related reactions were mentioned from the respondents. They noted that the church did not have the USM in its agenda, unless the USM were aggressive enough to verbalize their needs. Yet the response from the church, when it happened, was that of reluctance - fulfilling Christian virtues or pastoral duties rather than an act from the heart.

Importance of Support Systems

Christian life cannot be lived in a vacuum, thus, spirituality in the midst of the duties and responsibilities of USM determines their growth. Findings showed USM consulting each other or praying with one another over issues they were facing. The support system that USM gave each other fostered their spiritual development. Tham (2003, 13) gives personal contact as necessary for single parents, realizing that most of them have few close friends and that some have none at all.

Unmarried Single Mothers and Ministry

Discipleship and servanthood can be established by looking at personal priorities. The level of commitment is influenced by egocentrism or ability of one to

sacrifice, which can take place in the context of ministering to others. These showed less among USM since they were given limited opportunities for ministry. Though stereotyping the USM had influenced the opportunities given them to minister, some USM had accepted the limitations but did their best with what was made available to them. Some shied away from responsibilities for various reasons, yet the desire to serve was present. Wachege (2003, 235) discussed single mothers in general terms of those that have accepted the limited responsibilities, such as being a bride's maid at weddings, while others were regarded as being incomplete, and unfulfilled. The USM according to the research face greater resistance in taking part in church responsibilities.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research findings showed the USM who had had a "revolutionary point" experience in addition to a strong support system were perceived to have been growing spiritually. The revolutionary point experiences were seen as a breaking point in the lives of the USM. It was at that point, that they were convicted of their inner conflicts, which led them to a realization that they could live a life free of those inner struggles, and with Christ's help. The support systems, on the other hand, were instrumental in bringing about the revolutionary point experiences as well as strengthening the USM who had had the experience. The findings showed that the support systems, on their own without the revolutionary point experience, did not change the USM's self-image and the way she interpreted other's perception of her.

Recommendations

According to the research, sensitivity to the needs of the unmarried mothers is necessary. First there needs to be an understanding that there are various categories of single mothers and various circumstances that left them as unmarried mothers. It is important to study the causes of unmarried motherhood without judging them. The findings showed that the respondents represented three categories of unmarried single mothers. The single mothers come to church expecting grace, nurture, hence, the reactions of the church towards them should be that of acceptance and love. The church as a body of Christ should be true to its teachings and be a family, a relational body, where every member is loved and shepherded.

The church should accept the reality of unmarried motherhood. It is no longer myth or news only in other countries of Africa, but it is here with us and the church cannot afford to ignore it. The church should then address the subject of unmarried single mothers, exposing its causes as well as its life challenges which, to a greater extent, influence these mothers' daily experiences and thus their spiritual lives.

The church should consider training personnel in dealing with the sensitive groups of people, of which USM is one of them. Besides understanding the needs of USM, it is important to be strategic in program planning. The research showed that some USM were still shy and did not want to be recognized hence had not joined the SMF.

The church should put support systems in place. There are various avenues of enhancing self-acceptance, the revolutionary point and the response to life challenges. USM need a context where they sense that they belong, they are needed and have some degree of intimacy, and absence of suspicion. The church needs to create an environment that is conducive to spiritual growth for USM. Mentoring and discipleship programs are essential in providing support systems and in the healing process.

There is need to address theological and spiritual concerns of USM. It was noted that USM often blame others, either God, the devil or those who caused these women to be single mothers. Even though it may not be entirely the USM's fault that she is a USM, she has to accept the responsibility. Scriptures have to be approached as the whole a counsel of God. It is not enough for these women to turn to favorite scriptures either because they are used to justify one's actions or that one easily identifies with the Bible character. Both encouraging portions and those that condemn our actions, attitudes and belief system must be read. It is also true of the

kind of sermons or teachings given to the unmarried single mothers. They are sensitive people, yet one cannot teach only the portions of scripture, which allows the mothers to feel good about themselves.

The church needs to address and reevaluate the place of church rituals in the spiritual development of Christians. The tendency is to equate participation in rituals with spiritual development. The church needs to consider the African traditional values that strengthen morality and reduce the chance of dysfunctional families. The church should discourage unmarried motherhood and seek to provide alternatives without lowering the standards of a family as a divine institution.

There is need to create room for self-expression foremost before God. Since prayer was mentioned as an avenue where USM can pour out their thoughts and overcome trials that they face in their lives, fellowships would be organized.

Open forums and discussions where pointed issues can be addressed should be put in place. Since USM may not have any other adult in the home especially with growing children, there is need for adult talks and discussion.

Areas for Further Research

The research showed 'revolutionary point' as one of the factors influencing spiritual development among USM. Further study could be done on effective means of achieving the revolutionary point experience and the sustenance of its outcome.

This research dealt with USM in the urban setting. There is need to explore the experiences of USM in the rural areas. Another area of study is the teenage mothers, and single adults who adopt a child and also the experiences of the children of USM in their quest for spiritual nurture.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

LETTER OF ENTRY



NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

P.O. Box 24586, NAIROBI, KENYA
A Project of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA)

TEL : 254-2-882104/5, 882038
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14th January 2004

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: RESEARCH WORK

The bearer of this letter, Miss Rachel Mutai is a student at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST) and is doing research towards the completion of the Master of Divinity (Christian Education). The research is on "Exploring the Factors that Influence the Spiritual Development of Unmarried Single Mothers".

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

Sincerely,

Allan Mbugua
Academic Affairs Assistant

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS GUIDE

1. How has your experience been as you seek entry and interaction into the church or a believing community?
2. In what kind of activities are you involved?
3. What are some of the challenges that you sense/ think hinder or promote your spiritual growth
4. How have you managed this far? What has helped you cope with the challenges of the issues of life?
5. What would you recommend for the church or the believing community?

APPENDIX 3

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Exploration of factors that influence the Spiritual development of Unmarried Mothers.

Focus

The study seeks to explore the experiences of USM as they interact with the believing community in their search for spiritual nourishment and guidance.

Procedure

The researcher interviews 9 unmarried mothers who confess to be Christians or were at some point in their lives Christians and backslide for one reason or the other. The interview will take between 30-45 minutes.

Purpose / Significance of the Study

The study articulates the needs of the USMs of which its understanding will sensitize, improve, or inform the spiritual journey of the USMs.

Confidentiality

Only the researcher will use the recorded information and transcripts. Your name will not appear in any of the materials. The word participant will be used.

Participation

You are free to choose to participate or not in this interview. Your cooperation will be highly appreciated.

Participant's signature _____ Date

Rachel Mutai, the Researcher, Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology, P. O. Box 24686. Karen 00502, Nairobi, Tel. 0720725455.

CURRICULUM VITAE

PERSONAL DATA

Name: Rachel C. Mutai
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EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology	2001-2004
Kenya Highlands Bible College	1995-1999
Asbury College	1997-1998
Kipsigis Girls' High School	1990-1993
Kapcheptoror Primary School	1981-1989

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Teacher	Friends' Theological College	2000-2001
Chaplain	Moi Kipsitet Girls' School	1999