

Practicalities of Pastoral Care in Contemporary Society and its Implications for Curriculum Development

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Abstract

Nigerian society is characterised by different challenges, including economic instability and insecurity. These challenges have caused pain to individuals, families, and indeed, the entire society. With this experience, God-called persons are expected to bring relief and comfort to the hurting by discharging their responsibilities. However, these challenges facing the Nigerian society do not exempt the God-called persons, who do not only have similar experiences of economic instability and insecurity among others, but are also faced with dangers of threat to their lives as they discharge their responsibilities as pastoral caregivers. Thus, this paper established that post-modernity, globalisation, and restructuring characterise contemporary society with numerous hurting events that inflict pain on people in society. The prevalence of these challenges in society indicates the need for pastoral care ministry; a divine gift based on God's love to humanity, to assuage people's pain. The paper identified the dimensions of pastoral care to include worship, prayer, and faith formation, helping people to become like Christ. While asserting that the challenges facing contemporary society do not exempt pastoral caregivers, which make the practicality of the ministry a difficult task, the paper submitted that regardless of the enormity of the challenges facing contemporary society, pastoral care ministry is practicable and it implies that curriculum developers should strive to develop curriculum which will enable theological seminary students develop a heart of worship, a thirst for prayer, commitment to wholeness

and wellness ministry, discipleship and discipline through their love relationship with God and love and care relationships with people.

Introduction

Life is full of challenges and crises. The challenges and painful events of life make natural and obvious, the imperfections and weaknesses of humankind, and human in his weak state suggests the need for help and care so as not to be overwhelmed with the challenges and crises of life. The problems of man, which include health issues, marriage and family challenges, etc. presents, an opportunity to offer help and care so that God may restore normalcy through a pastoral caregiver. However, the experiences in contemporary society stand at variance in initiating necessary help and healing for the needy. Furthermore, the experiences in contemporary society are characterised by wars, rumours of wars, abduction, killings of innocent persons, inhuman treatment, oppression, nepotism and marginalisation, to mention but a few. It is sad to note that the experiences cut across all the nations of the world, making the society, despite being heterogeneous, homogeneous.

Thus, these experiences, which also include inhuman treatments of caregivers to people in crises, pose a challenge to the practicalities of pastoral care ministry. The pastoral care ministry is considered the service rendered by a God-called persons towards the physical and spiritual recovery of persons in need. Curriculum is the total experiences learners are exposed to in a learning environment. It includes curricular and co-curricular activities towards the holistic development of learners. On the other hand, curriculum development is the process by which new curricular and co-curricular activities are developed through renewal or improvement of the existing curriculum or total revamping.

This paper submits that despite contemporary society's numerous dangers, pastoral care ministry is practicable because it is deeply rooted in love and care relationships, stemming from God's love for humanity. Thus, this submission requires that the curriculum for training learners across educational institutions should evidently support the health and wellness of pastoral caregivers in training and the larger society.

Nature of Contemporary Society

The society comprises people who relate together to achieve a common goal. The study of social systems suggests that society is changing and will continue to change because of diverse progress, advancements and landmarks that man records daily. These changes make the practice of acts and professions different from those obtainable in time past. Unlike the past, the present society is characterised by three essential elements: post-modernity, globalisation and restructuring (Browning, Halci & Webster, 2000, pp. 13-14).

Post-Modernity

Post-modernity is a concept that is fast describing the contemporary society. It is socio-cultural change and revolution of a philosophical kind which pays little or no attention to details of religion or faith. It portrays the making of a new social system in which emphasis is laid on crucial aspects of social change that are both long-term and global (Lyon, 2000, p. 235). The description of post-modernity, as it relates to contemporary society, largely speaks of the predominance of information and communication technologies, including visual media, audio media and audio-visual media (Otunla, 2014, pp. 102-105).

Globalisation

Globalisation describes a growing interconnectedness among people of the world. Axford notes that it is a situation whereby the world is being made into one through universal and systemic properties and the increasing irrelevance of conventional borders such that economic, cultural and political boundaries are busted (Axford, 2000, pp. 239-241). However, a simple truth about globalisation is that breaking borders and boundaries does not imply complete homogeneity among the people in the world's nations.

Restructuring

This concept characterises the nature and impact of economic changes in the world's nations. It is a word that is used to explain and develop change, both productively and financially, such that consumption and utilisation of resources, industrial relations and politics at all levels

experience developments. At the same time, company financial structures are closely linked with broader organisational changes and developments in relation between workers and managers (Kilmister, 2000, p. 263).

Pastoral Care Ministry in Contemporary Society

The focus of this paper is not to trace the historical developments of pastoral care. Still, it is helpful to note that pastoral care has become complex and complicated with the passage of time. Mills (2005, p. 836) opines that pastoral care originates from “the biblical image of shepherd, and it refers to the solicitous concern expressed within the religious community for persons in trouble or distress.” Butler opines that pastoral care is an interdisciplinary activity that does not operate in a vacuum but in a context and within the society. It is based on relationship that entails effective dialogue between persons. Therefore, it is largely expected of a pastoral caregiver to engage the needy in effective dialogue through listening, reflecting, responding and resting. Through listening, a pastoral caregiver ensures his presence is felt as he gets acquainted with the needy and receives the necessary information objectively. Furthermore, the pastoral caregiver focuses the feelings of the needy by perceiving the needy through God’s lens of divine love, allowing the needy to express necessary emotions such as tears and offer care such as prayers as the outcome of the care from God is awaited (Butler, 2004, pp. 17, 19-20).

In contemporary society, pastoral care concern persons in Christian community and the general populace within a social system. It is a ministry based on love because everything in pastoral ministry is established on God’s love. London and Wiseman (1994, p. 115) summarily describe pastoral care ministry as love at work in three folds: the love of God to the person He calls, the love the person God calls has for God and the love of God and of the person He calls to other people in need.

The love of God to the man or woman He calls originates from God being the Creator of all things and His sovereignty over all He created (Gen. 1:1 and Ps. 24:1). He has specific purposes for all He does and He is always at work in which He invites others to join Him in His business of caring for people in need and distress. In His sovereignty

and invitation to all He calls, He “pursues a continuing love relationship” with them (Blackaby and King, 2014, p. 52). Upon God’s sovereignty and invitation, the man or woman God calls is largely expected to reciprocate God’s love towards him or her. It is expedient to call to mind that such a person is expected to walk in the area of spirituality which includes prayer and fasting, a meditation on God’s Word, and obedience to divine instruction among others (Adetayo, 2022, pp. 24-25). By implication, submission to the leadership of the Holy Spirit and commitment to doing God’s will become imperative. Such person is expected to be without any self-seeking behaviour which can tarnish the image of God and the pastoral ministry (Watkins, 1978, p. 34). Also, God’s love is not only for the one He calls but to everyone He has created. Correspondingly, the love the one God calls has for God compels him or her to love others and care for their needs.

It is pertinent to understand that the nature of pastoral care in contemporary society greatly depends on the situation and the form of the challenge experienced by the needy. To this, Best (2002, p. 19) explains three types of pastoral care to be reactive, proactive and developmental pastoral care. While reactive pastoral care is a care response consisting of counselling, guidance and a more generalised emotional support to a problem presented by the needy, proactive pastoral care and developmental pastoral care is equipping the needy ahead of crisis situation to be able to cope when the crises occur and helping the needy develop requisite skills ahead of crisis situation respectively.

Dimensions of Pastoral Care Ministry in Contemporary Society

Pastoral care in contemporary society takes place in different dimensions: worship, prayer, healing, hospitality, care, counselling, faith formation and discipline (Redding, 2012, p. 1).

Worship

Worship is a spiritual activity which reflects human response to God’s miraculous and mighty acts (Isa. 6:1-8; Jn. 4:23-24). Segler (1989, p. 5) affirms that worship “is an end in itself rather than a means to an

end.” Over the ages, pastoral care begins with an act of worship because the understanding and knowledge of God a pastoral caregiver possesses will largely determine the value such man or woman places on the care of himself or herself and of others who are also God’s creation. This affirmation establishes pastoral care as an act of worship unto God (Redding, 2012, p.4). Therefore, no one truly worships God that will not care for God’s creation.

Prayer

A potent instrument of communication and communion pastoral caregivers has is prayer. The use of this instrument by pastoral caregivers is an uncommon privilege because all sins and griefs are presented to God (Kolawole, 2016, p. 71). By virtue of the knowledge of God a pastoral caregiver possesses, people’s lives and struggles are made known to the caregiver, forming part of the content of grieves to be presented to God. It is, therefore imperative to state that the contents of prayer are as important as the methodology or approach to prayer because both features are determined by our faith in God and our belief about Him (Redding, 2012, p. 6).

Healing

Disorderliness and chaos are characteristic features of the contemporary society, both in the physical and spiritual spheres of life. Hence, healing, as a dimension of pastoral care in this context, is not only about physical wholeness and wellness but is inclusive of spiritual wholeness. While physical wellness emphasises the absence of pains, grief and despair, spiritual wellness is leading a sinner to Christ to reconcile with His Maker and other brethren. Therefore, the ministry of healing for pastoral caregivers in contemporary society signals “the birth of a new creation in the midst of the old” (Redding, 2021, p. 8).

Hospitality

Hospitality is not a new phenomenon that characterises the act of contemporary pastoral caregivers but “has been a culture and practice of God’s people” (Adejuwon, 2015, p. 131) because hospitality is an important and integral part of pastoral care ministry. The church in Bible times practised hospitality as Apostle Paul also admonished

Christians to be hospitable (Romans 12:13). Hospitality is rooted in relationship, comes to the fore through experience based on interaction between or among persons, and includes “welcoming, acceptance and provision of needed materials” (Adejuwon, 2015, pp. 131-132).

Care

Care as an aspect of pastoral care is rooted in relationship and commitment. It is ignited by compassion (Redding, 2012, p.14). Care is showing concern or giving close attention to persons or objects. Therefore, pastoral care in contemporary society involves pastoral caregivers being sensitive to the needs of others, responding promptly to the needs identified, determining the effectiveness of the care given through effective follow-up and sustaining the established relationship with people in need of care (Ayankeye, 2015, p.81-85).

Counselling

Counselling is not a new phenomenon and is not only confined to pastoral care ministry (Oladele, 1984, p. 56). It is a universal practice but with a pastoral approach in pastoral ministry. It is both simple and complex in nature because it requires relationship and professional guidance (Collins, 2007, p. 66). Counselling, as an act of pastoral care ministry in contemporary society, entails pastoral caregivers discovering the challenge the needy is facing, probing to obtain additional information about the challenge, meditating for divine inspiration towards solving the challenge and advising the needy on the right approach or step to take (Dobbins, 2004, p. 216).

Faith Formation

The need for faith formation as a dimension of pastoral care in contemporary society cannot be over-emphasised as various challenges and social vices greatly abound in the society. Therefore, faith formation in contemporary society is central to God’s plan for humanity. It is a process which never ends but result into Christ-likeness. It also ensures that people are not stagnant in their relationship with God; hence, the need for effective discipleship for all persons, and especially those in need.

Furthermore, discipleship as faith formation and a dimension of pastoral care also involves relationship. It is experiential; it involves conscious decision, a response and a guide. It is not vague neither is it an abstract. This is why it is a life-transforming exercise that includes a needy wilful decision to live in total obedience to God's Word (Oyeniya, 2016, p. 213). Similarly, it is largely expected that through faith formation, "people would live differently as a result of knowing God and internalising his truth" through wilful desire to grow to fulfil God's purpose, exposure to know God and deliberate commitment to positively respond to the truth known (Gorman, 2006, pp. 672-673).

Discipline

Contrary to general belief that it bears a negative connotation, it is focused on formation of disciples through biblical nurture, encouragement and correction done in love. Furthermore, alongside discipline as a dimension of pastoral care is accountability in which spiritual supervision, choosing of partners in the practice of various spiritual disciplines and mentoring is emphasised (Redding, 2012, p. 19).

Practicalities of Pastoral Care Ministry in Contemporary Society

Pastoral caregivers are daily being exposed to dangers that make the practicality of pastoral care ministry in contemporary times difficult. This section is therefore devoted to examining the practicality of pastoral care in contemporary society. The practicalities of pastoral care ministry in the context of this paper are traced historically to the era of Jesus' ministry and the early church. It is instructive to know that Jesus Christ exists for both the temporal and eternal well-being of humanity and by implication does not have mere concern for humanity but holistic concern such that His death brings about both spiritual and physical recovery from crisis situation (Watkins, 1978, pp. 31-32).

Similarly, the early church practiced pastoral care in its full depth and breadth as they showed concern for one another to the point of selling their properties to meet the needs of others amidst them (Acts 2:44-45). Watkins (1978, pp. 7-8) explains that not even persecution

discouraged them from the practice of care ministry which they show without favouritism as they put their faith in God to work through courageous and sacrificial relief work for all men. Furthermore, the practice of pastoral care is significant from other traditions of old because the numbers of caregivers increased with Christians having the right approach to help the needy personally.

From the foregoing, the practicality of pastoral care in contemporary society is largely expected to be based on the same spirit with which Christ and members of the early church lived. By implication, pastoral care in contemporary society is based on relationship which can be expressed in two dimensions: pastoral caregiver's love relationship with God, and pastoral caregiver's love and care relationships with people.

Pastoral Care-Giver's Love Relationship with God

The practice of pastoral care begins with love relationship with God expressed through sincerity and devotion. It is vital for a pastoral caregiver to enter into such relationship with God for his life and the life of others he would minister to. Therefore, it is an imperative for a pastoral caregiver to "cultivate and sustain a vital love relationship with God (Adams, 1986, pp. 23-24).

Pastoral Care-Giver's Love and Care Relationships with People

As much as the love relationship a pastor has for people in need will make him to understand the nature of their need, his care relationship will make a pastor not just to understand them intellectually, but also emotionally, be humane and real to them in their crisis situations (Watkins, 1978, p. 73).

From the foregoing, the need and practicalities of pastoral care in contemporary society is obvious; however, its practicalities are also influenced by pastoral caregiver's value because values shape perception of human beings about life. In pastoral care ministry, value is of utmost significance because pastoral care ministry is value-based as it provides a suitable and supportive platform for the work of a pastoral caregiver and by implication; pastoral caregivers draw their inspiration of value from their vision of a good life (Lynch, 2002, pp. 7, 10).

In this regard, understanding a good life by a pastoral caregiver is imperative. Therefore, it is to this extent that a pastoral caregiver determines the vision of good life he brings to pastoral care, determine the adequacy of the vision for the good life and how his understanding of the good life is being promoted in his pastoral care ministry (Lynch, 2002, p.16).

Implications for Curriculum Development

The implications which can be drawn from practicalities of pastoral care in contemporary society towards curriculum development include implications for thorough situation analysis, implications for relevant curriculum contents and implications for friendly teaching approach.

Implications for Detailed Situation Analysis

Curriculum developers have to be sensitive in carrying out a detailed situation analysis which is often the first step in every curriculum work. It is the process by which different factors including teachers, learners, environment, social, economic, political, or institutional factors are analysed and assessed to determine their potential impact on a school's curriculum; its development, implementation and evaluation. The analysis involves a series of consultation, observation, surveys and reviews to develop a productive curriculum. The main task for thorough situation analysis in this paper's context would be to develop a curriculum that satisfies the wishes of the society (Moronkola, Akinsola, Abe & Onuka, 2019, pp. 72-73). It is obvious that the society and the activities within are hurting: poor economy which needs revitalisation, insecurity, bad leadership among others. All these suggest the need for a curriculum that will prepare pastoral caregivers to address the hurting situations and the persons affected by these situations. From the foregoing, it is expedient to state that curriculum developers should adequately consider the society where pastoral caregivers will function to develop curriculum that will meet needs of the people and the larger society through a detailed situation analysis that is carried out systematically.

Implication for Relevant Curriculum Content

An obvious truth raised in this paper is that pastoral care ministry succeeds on the platform of effective communication, social and relational skills which must be expressed or exhibited without interference that will distort message and/or response sent. However, it is observed that some pastoral care-givers in training lack these skills which are significant for successful pastoral care ministry in contemporary society. This development can nevertheless be addressed through the provision of curriculum contents that address these concerns. The curriculum content of training pastoral caregivers, which is one of the components of education that determine the quality of education, should be developed with clear cut objectives, with richness in communication, social and relational skills (Henson, 2015, p. 169). This will enhance the communication and relationship of pastoral care-givers with others in the society. Similarly, the curriculum content should be consistent with the experiences of the learners and the society at large for the possibility of the practicalities of pastoral care ministry in contemporary society (Henson, 2015, pp. 254-255 and Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018, pp. 232-233).

Implications for Friendly Teaching Approach

The practicalities of pastoral care in contemporary society are based on relationship: love and care relationships. As much as pastoral caregivers are expected to relate well, this should not only be with God but also with the congregation and the society where they function at large. It is therefore instructive to note that curriculum administrators who implement curriculum contents should implement the contents on the basis of relationship and discipline to ensure that God's will is established. The implementation of the curriculum contents in a love and care atmosphere will enhance meaningful learning (Goleman, 2004, p. vii). Curriculum administrators' friendly but disciplined approach to curriculum implementation will inspire pastoral care-givers in training to make sense of their world. The love atmosphere during curriculum implementation should be expressed through support and appreciation of learners' effort while teaching since meaningful learning is achieved on the platform of social and emotional learning because of the connection of social environment

of learning and emotions of learners during curriculum implementation to human brain.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has examined ‘practicalities of pastoral care in contemporary society and its implications for curriculum development’ by explaining the varied concepts in the title, the nature of contemporary society, pastoral care ministry in contemporary society, dimensions of pastoral care ministry in contemporary society, practicalities of pastoral care ministry in contemporary society and implications for curriculum development. The paper concludes, that regardless of contemporary society's challenges, pastoral care ministry is practicable. It is therefore recommended that:

1. Curriculum developers should make conscious efforts to develop a curriculum that will enable theological seminary students develop a heart of worship for God. Furthermore, the curriculum should inspire them to thirst for prayer, be committed to wholeness and wellness ministry, hospitality, care and counselling ministry, and discipleship and discipline through their love relationship with God and love and care relationships with people.
2. The curriculum developed should be implemented in a friendly atmosphere to appeal to the social and emotional consciousness of the learners for cognitive learning to take place.

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