

## **Mend the family to fix social ills**

Ludwe Jayiya

Our beloved country is faced with many problems. Life is getting more complicated each and every day.

Many of the social problems that we are battling with are as a result of broken families. The country is confronted with a decline in family life. Too many families are falling apart.

This crisis of families falling apart is posing a problem to our society. Most of the social ills emanate from broken families.

I have had the privilege of speaking to ex-offenders. In their sharing I realised that the majority of them are from broken families.

There is a host of factors contributing to the breaking down of family life.

The high rate of unemployment has been identified as one. Unemployment puts so much strain on parents and forces them to find ways of surviving and providing for their families.

That is why you would find one or both of the parents moving to another city to find a job. Children are left with grandparents, neighbours or alone.

In the past mothers who were housewives, made a big contribution in building families.

To build a family is a full-time job. It that needs love, care and commitment.

Housewives are becoming a relic of the past, particularly in poor communities.

Mothers leave their homes to find a livelihood for their families. There is a gap in our families because of the absent mothers.

In addition, HIV and AIDS is continuing to dispossess children of the opportunity to be raised by their parents.

The number of orphans is increasing daily, because of HIV and Aids other disease like covid-19.

Research shows that one in five children is an orphan, having lost one or both parents. According to a recent study, nearly 100 000 children are living in child-headed households.

The numbers reflect serious problems in our families.

If one looks at the nature of the problems around the decline of family life, you would find that they are largely as a result of poor parenting or absent parents.

Parenting has become a difficult vocation.

Calls are being made by government and civil organisation for something to be done to deal with this problem that is threatening the future of our country.

The dialogue should focus on the restoration of families.

I think we should refrain from blaming the past while we do nothing in dealing with the present. It should be a responsibility of each and every South African to work towards the restoration of families.

In our process of trying to find ways to help in the restoration of families let us take counsel from the words of Pope Francis; "no family drops down from heaven perfectly formed. Families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love. People grow in holiness, and the church must be there to give them a helping hand rather than turn them away because they have not attained some degree of perfection".

In this endeavour of restoration of families, the church should take a leading role. It should be the interest of the church to work towards strengthening parenting and give emotional and other forms of support to parents.

These are some of the ways in which the Church can lead the way in the restoration of family life and values:

- The Church should work towards developing training and programs that are concentrated around strengthening parenting.
- The Church should accommodate different emotional needs of parents.
- Church personnel should be humble enough to accept their limitations. Not all church ministers are trained and specialise in counselling. The nature of some of the family problems need to be given to people who specialise in family counselling. Referring to a specialist is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of wisdom and competence.
- The Church should use all available media platforms in promoting family life. At the moment, I think not much is being done to counter-act the culture that is working against family life in our media. The Church should take the lead by providing educational programs on family life for our media platforms.
- Each and every pastor should work towards establishing a family desk in his or her community, that will focus on ministering to families. This is particularly important in poor communities, where people have no means to seek help.
- The government should employ more psychologists in public and private schools, to deal with children who are not coping with issues that emanate from family problems. It is important that these issues should be identified as soon as possible.

The words of Mother Teresa will assist us to continue reflecting on family restoration: “the way you help heal the world is that you start with your own family”.

May God continue to bless our families.

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