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CS502: The Church as a Social & Cultural Institution: NOS/NA

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Final Holistic Mission Project Paper

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. Abstract

Abstract Studies show that there is a significant number of adolescents that struggle with mental health concerns, particularly depression that is brought on by a number of factors including biological, environmental, situational, physical, and spiritual. Due to lack of resources, stigma around mental health and sometimes ignorance, many adolescents go undiagnosed or do not receive proper treatment or care for these issues. Fortunately, depressive symptoms can be controlled with proper treatment such as medication management, therapy, and psycho education. Religious involvement is generally conducive to a better mental health patients with psychiatric disorders frequently use religion to cope with their distress.

Due to this correlation of greater spiritual involvement and lower depressive symptoms, a holistic mission is designed to incorporate all treatment factors to help youth who struggle with depression in the Church. The Church will be the setting to serve as a sanctuary to offer counseling, spiritual transformation through Christ, psych education and much more in order to help the youth combat these depressive symptoms and the issued that come along with it.

Introduction: Culture and Context

Periodically, I have been observing the neighborhood in which my church is located to discern the need of the youths. Why the youths? I have a passion for them, and they are our future leaders. Consequently, if they live effective lives today then they will be more effective leaders tomorrow. So, often I would observe them, and I see a large number of them appear withdrawn, isolated and when I say hello to them, they respond with their head hanging down. Based on my scrutiny of their behavior I felt compelled to help these dying souls out of darkness to explore for spiritual intervention. Those observations prompt me to undertake depression in the youths.

Depression is one of the most common mental health issues among youths killed silently without any warning in the United States and around the world. Depression is the most prominent mental illness in the world and is a common serious medical illness that can affect someone negatively. ¹ It has major and significant effects on how someone feels, thinks, and acts. Depression can affect everyone differently but there are some general behavior patterns among the depressed.

The children are struggling daily to balance and safely cope with their emotions. The research indicated that depression is becoming more prevalent among children and adolescents. Georgetown University reports that between 2016 and 2019 and by 2020 there was a tremendous increase of 5.6 million kids (9.2%) that had been diagnosed with anxiety and 2.4 million kids (4.0%) diagnosed with depression. ¹

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Osorio, A., (2022) *Georgetown University Health Policy Institute Center For Children*

This is frightening and plays a vital role in why young children become very violent and resort to weapons of mass destruction and shooting up schools killing innocent ones. They are crying out for help and, unfortunately, many families are not equipped or do not know how to assist them. So, without any coping mechanisms or skills they deliberately listen to the unknown voice in their head and commit murder and then suicide.

The federal government in Washington acknowledged the growing crisis of mental health. It is becoming a trend that is heading in the wrong direction. However, it was reported that the pandemic, most likely exacerbated the growing issue of anxiety and depression among children. There is also a decrease in caregivers' well-being as well as parents and guardians not being trained in how to manage such mental states. ² Honestly, I am sure most of the caregivers are scared because they have no understanding of the roller coaster of emotions they observed in their child. This is a delicate situation that needs intervention and to be maneuvered by a professional.

Nevertheless, the House passed a bill that provides states with a "permanent increase in their federal match rate" ³ to support the children's mental health through home and community service. I hope with financial stability the local government will move, with some urgency, in making some progress to address the children's troublesome mental health crisis.

² Moe, John. (2020). *Hilarious world of depression*, Frist Edition May 2020

³ Osorio, A., (2022) *Georgetown University Health Policy Institute Center For Children*

I hope with financial stability the local government will move with some urgency in making some progress to address the children's troublesome mental health crisis. A lot of these children's mental issues are not addressed because the communities have no resources to provide for the youths who are struggling with such issues. This deficit and lack of resources in the local community is why I feel compelled to serve in this area of duty for the Lord.

1. Focusing on Depression

According to Psychiatric Times, depression has eight symptoms of Criteria B for major depressive disorder (MDE) in the DSM-III. In 107 cases and fifty-seven non- cases of MDE (all had depressed mood or pervasive anhedonia for more than 2 weeks) Sleep change, loss of energy, and appetite change were the most common symptoms. ⁴The studies also found feelings of worthlessness and psychomotor issues (signs of restlessness, an inability to sit still; dashing around without purposeful movement; pacing; the tapping of one's fingers; and abruptly starting and stopping tasks). They experience voices in their head, thoughts of suicide, self-reproach, guilt, shame, and absence of sleep. ⁵Reading the data that was conducted in a school assessment on children and adolescents, I was very heartbroken about their levels of depression and anxiety.

⁴ Dein, S. FRCPsych, PhD. (2010). "Religion, Spirituality, and Mental Health"

⁵ DePaulo Jr., J. R. (2002). *Understanding Depression: What we know & what you can do about it*

This is a major existential crisis as the Coronavirus plagues the world. These children cannot contain their constant sadness, it becomes a daily struggle for them to function due to their mental health conditions. They cannot enjoy a quality lifestyle because they are wrestling with the helplessness of darkness. “Depression tells you nothing good, the logical thoughts are to make everything stop.”⁶

It was reported that previous studies have found that ADHD, depression, and general anxiety disorder (GAD) are all strongly correlated with suicidal ideation. Specifically, “Adolescents with ADHD are at a higher risk of suicide than adolescents without ADHD”⁶ (Psychiatric Times). The diagnosis of depression disorder manifests bipolar disorder, atypical depression, and postpartum depression. These range from mild to severe depression, and they experience symptoms daily, there is no escape my God the world is crying out for Jesus to save them. These children struggle with weight fluctuations and loss of pleasure in all aspects. Depression or mental health issues are stimulated by a chemical imbalance of serotonin according to the Centers for Disease Control.⁷

The imbalance of serotonin is widespread and causes the use of antidepressants like serotonin reuptake inhibitors otherwise known as SSRIs. This SSRIs inhibitor boosts serotonin in the brain. Even though scientists found a chemical imbalance of serotonin as the culprit for depression, there was no link between serotonin and depression was found in the blood.

⁶ Moe, John. (2020). *Hilarious world of depression*, Frist Edition May 2020, St Martin’s Press (page 90)

⁷ Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention “Children Mental Disorder

Clinical and research data indicate a 20% prevalence of depression among school-age children.⁸ There is evidence that shows in some cases mental health or depression is hereditary, or medical complications during birth or other factors. The other factors that can create these issues are drug addiction or environmental stressors such as socioeconomic factors. As I continued my research, I learned that as children are assessed and diagnosed with depression, they become less motivated. They sometimes become uncooperative along with deficient performance in school. They probably feel hopeless and do not have the drive to complete any task and become a problem child. I can imagine these children must have been terrified listening to their diagnosis as they are faced with such a challenge.

2. Geographic Location

My church is currently located in, Jamaica, Queens. Queens has a population of 133,356 with a mixture of Spanish, Muslims, and African Americans.⁹ There is a large number of young children and college students living in the neighborhoods. I have observed there is no community center within the area of the church. I have been scanning the area for about a year and taking a mental survey. I noticed quite a bit of children always sitting in a nearby park or hanging around outside their front door. Normally the evangelism department will host a street church service every three months as long as it is conducive to the weather. During this time, I discerned quite a few young people with mental issues, but they were receptive to the word of God and accepted prayer.⁷ My spirit is troubled to see the condition of their mental state.

⁸ Hart, S. L. (1991). *Childhood depression: implications and options for school counselors* (page 277)

⁹ An informal observation on July 23, 2022

Some people recognize there is an issue mentally, but they refuse to seek help because of fear of being stigmatized with a helpless diagnosis of depression or mental health issues.

This is the reason I conclude that the church is the antidote for the youths who are struggling with depressive symptoms. The church would be a safe haven for those that are in close proximity. The church would not judge them because Jesus is the only judge. They would have a feeling of belongingness and love.

III. Theology of Holistic Mission – The Desperate Cry for Jesus and the Church

The Church is the body of Christ and a place of refuge for the refugees. This sinful world is full of turmoil, and physical and emotional abuse; therefore, the church would be the safest place. Psalm 9:9. “The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.” The church is a place for all who are suffering from condemnation. It gives hope, a sense of belonging, peace, and comfort. It is a place to go when afraid and lost to find a purpose. It is a place where lives can be transformed. The Church helps to teach and create a support system for the lost and redemptive souls. The Church is a Social and Cultural Institution where we manifest the love of God to the world. It is a community center base for spiritual growth and revealing the love of Jesus. The church is the bride of Christ and that is why a lot of political leaders seek the church as a liaison to pray for the government.

One of the purposes of the church is to pray for those in authority to live Godly and peacefully. Jesus is a miracle worker that no one can fathom. Religion and spirituality play an essential role in the healing process of illness. Many individuals who are experiencing mental health often ask for faith leader intervention. This faith leader intervention is a form of public health perspective. Faith leaders, chaplains or pastors are considered as gatekeepers or first responders especially when families are faced with mental health. Technically they are crying

out for God to mediate between them and the devil. It was reported that a religious institution was responsible for the care of depression disorder, and it was report a significant changes in behaviors. The rate of depression decreases, and the symptoms were less. ⁸ Christ is the only mediator to reduce tension, stabilize emotional variability and diminish anxiety. Christ is the center of our living being. Over seventy years ago a Protestant theologian wrote the Serenity Prayer “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

This prayer literally starts with “God” asking God to intercede by giving a state of calmness, peacefulness and to release the troubled mind. Obviously, God is the catalyst that attributes to a positive state of mind. While depression, addiction, and mental health often bring, loss of control and emotional turmoil.¹⁰

Therefore, introducing the youths who are lost in sin to Jesus through the church is the best course of action. The youths are vulnerable, they are oppressed and are desperately crying out for help because of the mental issues they are faced with. This is the call of the church that holds the name of Jesus. We the church have a responsibility to save the needy who are hopeless, frustrated, and become reckless and turn to violence out of desperation. In the Gospel of Mark chapter 5 Jesus recognized a man had a mental issue because he was living among the tombs and cutting himself with stones. Jesus immediately discerns the desperation in this man. Jesus released his troubled mind of mental confusion.

¹⁰ Thapar, A, Collishaw, S., Potter, R., & Thapar, A. K. (2010). (Page 254)

Managing and preventing depression in adolescents, BMJ: British

Large prospective studies have also shown that adolescent depression is associated with risk of suicide between ages 14 – 19. These reports are extremely concerning, that is the reason why we give our children attention and to be aware of what is happening with them. Especially when they are having behavioral issues.¹¹

Here it is today Jesus left us to be a representation of Him to do the same on earth. The Book of Matthew 18 states, “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven” Thus, I feel a great conviction for the church to be engaged in saving our future generation who are living in despair. Their depression and instability can further contribute to more violence if the church continues to be complacent and not aware of the crisis the world faces today. Jesus states in Mark 8, “Our soul has great value.” And Mark chapter 10 states, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” Jesus has a passion especially for children despite their age.

The churches are placed in the communities to mentor, ensure a positive experience, to encourage individuals to holiness, be faithful, and guide them to Christ by preparing them for the kingdom and having a closer connection to a loving God.

¹¹ Thapar, A., Collishaw, S., Potter, R., & Thapar, A. K. (2010). *Managing and preventing depression in adolescents*, BMJ: British (Page 255)

1. Theological Implications of Depression

Depression in the Bible is considered as a lack of hope and trust in God. According to the Spiritual Times people who are having spiritual depression felt a disconnecting from God. Usually, people who have such experience are struggling with their faith and believe God has turned His back on them. This is unmistakable evidence that Satan is attacking their minds. That is the reason why Paul said, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7) God is informing us if we turn to Him in our challenging times, He will supply us with peace beyond our own understanding. God is our protector and He supernatural and we should not be anxious for nothing. Satan’s job is to place us in chain and shackles and to destroy lives. Once a person is living in sin, they are more susceptible to demonic attacks. Living in sin is darkness and darkness is attracted to evil. On the opposite side is Jesus who is the light of the world. Once a person is living in the light he or she will shine in the dark. Satan will escape or flee from being in the light because he has evil intent. Depression is a mental state of the brain illness; if the Holy Spirit does not guard our minds Satan will attack the mind. When he attacks the mind there will be voices of unknown origin. That is the reason, why the Bible states, “we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Ephesians 6:12) the principalities are the voices that communicate with individuals with depression and mental health problems. Another verse in the Bible states, “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10: 4-5) So, it’s the church’s duty to not only help these

children but also win souls for Christ because we are going against power of darkness and principalities that only God are capable of discerning.

2. Overcoming Depression in the Bible

The Bible is a navigator for us to live our lives and it has given several examples of our patriots who had their own circumstances but overcame their struggles. A great example was Job who lost everything he possessed including his children. Most likely he was depressed but was able to overcome it because he had faith and trusted God with his entire heart. Even when his wife told him to curse God, he refused to listen to her. In Job 30, he says “Terror overwhelms me in my life ebbs away, days of suffering grip me. Night pierces my bones, my gnawing pain never rests.” Today many of us including our youths are struggling with depression as Job did so they can overcome their sickness. Job had a personal relationship with God, but our church can assist these young people to develop a relationship with God and their faith will increase as time progresses. There are notable examples of how depression existed in ancient times and still exists today but there is one common denominator in it all having a connection with God. By having a connection with God who holds all power we all can overcome any illness. Jeremiah said, “Cursed be the day I was born, why did I ever come out of the womb to see trouble and sorrow and to end my days in shame.” (Jeremiah 20:14) The reality of depression, anxiety, and mental health is real with this excellent illustration. Another reference is this powerful man of God who became weak and ran from an evil woman who was seeking to kill him. The prophet Elijah seemed as if he was showing suicidal ideation and prayed to die. He states, “I have had enough Lord. Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” (1 Kings 19:4) However, he restored his relationship with God and gained his strength. Basically, the answer is Jesus in our troubled world today.

3. Biblical Implications of Depression and Mental Health

In Christianity, it is a general consensus that the Bible serves as a spiritual guide and a way to keep us connected to God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. The Bible also plays a fundamental role in providing us with scriptures and messages needed to get through hardships, life traumas and experiences and an entire array of additional distresses. Although our Holy book may not blatantly talk about depression, there are many verses that reflect how God prepared us to deal with issues such as mental health, distress, and depression in our lives. For example, these verses read, “The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble” (Psalm 9:9). “Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18). “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). “I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure” (Psalm 40:1-2).

All these verses use verbiage such as oppressed, troubled, labor, heavy laden, brokenhearted, crushed in spirit and pit of destruction. Those who felt or experience emotions of depression do not have a safe or effective means of coping. These verses also use important words such as stronghold, saves, compassion, comfort and secure that indicate that no matter the negative feelings and emotions God can transform the individual and help them to reach a level of peace in Christ.

. Holistic Mission

In order to get the youths in the neighborhood involved and to introduce them to Christ I would create flyers advertising social gatherings at church every Friday night with freshmen. My plans are to get the young people at church to mobilize a social gathering that would involve games night, Bible puzzle, career night, group session, and counseling night with professionals such as social workers and licensed mental health counselors. During this session, we would survey and assess their individual needs.

I will be meeting with the youth pastor and the young people in order to collaborate on an effective outreach in the community of the church. I will be discussing with the media team at church ideas on the best way to create flyers that we can distribute to the local community encouraging them to attend church services. It would entail an invitation to the young people in the community to attend our Youth Service, the theme will be, “come meet and mingle with your peers, there will be refreshments and games” every Friday night 7 pm – 10 pm. There will be various resources available. I will arrange for testimonial sessions such as success stories of those who have experienced depression and were able to overcome it. These testimonials will give them a sense of hope and belongingness.

1. Creating a Space in the Sanctuary for the Youth

Once the advertising went forth the youths of the church would be assisting with a warm welcome in the sanctuary. The strangers will be directed and ushered to have refreshments and to be seated. We will begin the service around 7:30 pm depending on attendees and activities. The youth pastor will officially and formally welcome everyone. He will pray for the Lord's intervention for clarity, discernment, and against principalities and the power of darkness. Asking the Lord to remove every burden and loss the chains that are holding them, because Jesus

is the chain breaker and read a scripture. I am convinced once this plan is implemented the church as a body will be able to save souls for the kingdom. Children will be delivered from the evil that is tormenting their souls. I am aware this is warfare but with prayer and fasting the Lord will deliver since we are powerless without Jesus.

2. Avocation of Community Resources and Involvement

Once this mission is fully on board, I will be lobbying for donations to assist with the weekly sessions. The financial contributions will be given to the youth treasurer or accountant of the church to officially document the total each week. I will be visiting the local college's theological department, psychology department, neighborhood mechanic shops, body shop, and political community center hoping we can implement a collective approach that will impact our youths. I will be seeking various professional volunteers from my hospital to assist in this mission. I am praying for a positive outcome and slowly with Jesus and professional help this will assist those who are isolated and withdrawn, most of all. If we could assist one or two out of ten souls, then the church would have done its job. My ultimate goal is to get these children delivered, spiritually transformed and to teach them the truth about God.

. Conclusion

The mission to salvage the young lives from the strongholds of depression is a challenge, but all things are possible with Jesus. However, the scripture states, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). This verse is true, consequently, this mission can be accomplished. It is undeniable, when we unite in action it becomes powerful and it is indeed infinitely more powerful when God, the omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient is the centerpiece of the partnership. With the empowerment of God and the church, I am confident this task will be accomplished.

Depression plagues our young people in many ways. It is significantly correlated with suicides, physical aggression, self-harm, low self-esteem, and school dropouts, and comorbid with other mental health and medical diseases. With help from members of the church and the community to embark on this holistic mission, the lives of these adolescents can be changed and transformed to overcome their depression and find hope, peace of mind and spirit, and grace in Christ.

We are the church that God uses as a vehicle to meet the needs of the lost and dying generation. Children are God's best gift and generous legacy. The devil and this world's system are united in purpose to destroy our children and young generation. My desire is to work together with the body of the church with God at the front for this Holistic development. "Alone we can do so little, together, we can do so much." (Helen Keller)

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