INTRODUCTION

AFM Colleague,

All indications are that we are beyond the first peak of Covid-19. I need to emphasise that the possibility of another wave of infection is real. I, therefore, urge you to remain vigilant and comply with all Covid-19 safety protocols. Some of the issues in this letter are prayer and self-care.
The Power of Prayer

Past. M.G. Mahlobo (President of the AFM of SA) - mmahlobo@afm-agrs.org

One may ask the question and rightly so: “Why is it necessary to talk about the power of prayer in a communication addressed to Pastors?” It is important to be mindful of the fact that we are part of a society that relies more on what is humanly possible. It is a generation that is skeptical about divine intervention and would rather rely on science and other resources to deal with life’s challenges. For this reason, we need to reflect, from time to time, on important aspects as well as the efficacy of prayer.

Important Aspects of Prayer

In Matthew 6: 9-13 there are six important attributes of prayer. These are: (1) relationship with God (our Father), (2) recognition of God’s nature (hallowed be your Name), (3) realisation and acceptance that current reality is not in line with God’s will (Your Kingdom come, and Your will be done on earth as it is done in heaven), (4) receptive attitude towards God’s providence (give us today our daily bread), (5) repentance and penitence (and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors), and (6) rescue appeal from evil (and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one).

Efficacy of Prayer Demonstrated

The Bible presents us with many examples of the power of prayer. I would highlight three of these.

1. Hannah: 1 Samuel 1: 1-28

In 1 Samuel 1: 10-11 we read about Hannah’s prayer: “In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. 11 And she made a vow, saying, “Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.” Hannah addressed her prayer to the LORD Almighty. She declares her relationship with YHWH with whom they have a covenant. She also recognises the omnipotence of God. She calls God “LORD Almighty” (or of hosts). This was the first time that this title, “LORD of Mighty Armies” was used by an individual in conversation with God. Hannah felt attacked by her rival, so she called on the “LORD Almighty” to be her protector. Her prayer was answered in 1 Samuel 1:20.


When Jehoshaphat, the 4th King of Judah was faced with an imminent invasion by a coalition of powerful enemies, he convened a national prayer. In 2 Chronicles 20: 5-12 he invokes the relationship that his ancestors had with God. He recognises God’s reign over the nations and God’s almighty power over calamities. He also declares their helplessness and dependence on God’s intervention. In verse 12 he says: “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.” The power of prayer is demonstrated in the way God intervened. The invaders were conquered without anyone from Judah lifting a finger or a weapon. God’s intervention is an indication that we can solicit His intervention in times of threat and crises.

“We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.”


In Acts 12 the Roman Emperor, King Herod Agrippa 1, unleashed persecution on the church. The casualties of this persecution included James who was killed and Simon Peter who was
imprisoned. Peter was under heavy security in prison. There were no prospects for him escaping. In Acts 12:5 we read that the church convened and earnestly prayed for him. This corporate prayer resulted in the angel miraculously releasing Peter and guiding him through all the security gates to his freedom. It was clear that this became possible through God’s intervention. An effective prayer can unlock prison chains and open prison doors.

“The Church’s National Office Bearers (NOB) namely the President, the Deputy President, the General Secretary, and the General Treasurer will be elected at the next GBM.”

Our predecessors were men and women of prayer. The growth of this church in this country, and beyond, can be ascribed to their prayer life, dedication, sacrifice, and pursuit of holiness. If all else fail, we can be assured that the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective (James 5:16). Prayer is our “war room” in times of distress and crises. I would like to see all AFM local Assemblies having “Prayer War Rooms” (PWR). Each PWR should have a dedicated team of Prayer Warriors and focus on specific issues within the church and in their communities. The current challenges in our society, locally and globally, require that we earnestly seek God’s intervention.

THE 2020 GENERAL BUSINESS MEETING (GBM) & THE NATIONAL AFM CONFERENCE: THE WAY FORWARD
Past. M.G. Mahlobo (President of the AFM of SA) - mmahlobo@afm-agz.org

The convening of the AFM of SA 2020 Annual Conference (AC) and General Business Meeting (GBM) which was originally scheduled for 6-9 September 2020, had to be postponed due to the national lockdown regulations. These regulations restrict church gatherings to 50 people. During a virtual meeting in July this year, the National Leadership Forum (NLF) resolved that three tentative dates be set aside as possible alternatives. The determining factor will be the number of people allowed for church gatherings. The earmarked dates are 8-12 November 2020 or 14-18 February 2021 or 14-18 March 2021. The venue remains Word and Life (Woord en Lewe) in Boksburg. My request is that you diarise these tentative dates.
THE 2020 GENERAL BUSINESS MEETING (GBM) & THE NATIONAL AFM CONFERENCE: THE WAY FORWARD

The first phase of the process has been completed. I would like to express my appreciation to all Assembly Governing Bodies and Regional Committees who sent in their preferred nominees. These Nominees were subjected to vetting by the Scrutiny Committee which was appointed by the NLF. The successful nominees have accepted their nominations. Their names and CV’s have been circularised by the Office of the General Secretary. To view and download the CV’s of the nominees visit the following link on the AFM website: https://afm-ags.org/newsflash-friday-21-august-2020-resources/

They will constitute the pool from which the GBM will elect the new NOB members. However, the election process allows for the nomination of candidates from the floor, who are not in the pool.

The office of the General Secretary will be in contact with you via your Regional Secretary or Administrator to ensure that your assembly information is captured accurately on the AFM National Office database. Your cooperation will be appreciated.

PASTORAL SELF-CARE

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Feeding, leading, equipping, serving and caring are all a part of the Biblical calling of pastors. To really care for others affectively and continuously, necessitates that pastors must apply self-care. Self-care is the physical, emotional, and spiritual equivalent of maintaining a vehicle. You must regularly change the oil, check the battery etc. to ensure better performance and longevity of your car.

“Self-care is the physical, emotional, and spiritual equivalent of maintaining a vehicle.”

During the pandemic, even though Pastors cannot be with their congregants physically, they are trying to care for the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health of their congregants - although a significant number say they themselves are exhausted, stressed and isolated. Pastors often do not recognise the fatigue and stress caused by fulfilling their ministry. They tend to spiritualise away the need for self-care. Other people and even Pastors themselves, consider it a lack of trust in God to invest in self-care activities. This might lead to self-pressure, self-promotion and workaholism which causes poor health and even an early death.
The Example Of Jesus

Four Major Areas Of Self-Care
1. Spiritual: (Heart). This include prayer, Bible study, devotions, worship, solitude and scriptural meditation. Not for “work” purposes, but for the personal spiritual life of the Pastor. We should never confuse our own spiritual journey with God with that of the assembly in which we work.

2. Mental: (Intellect). Mental self-care includes things like thinking, reading and discussing issues with others, as well as processing your experiences and thoughts. Intentionally take breaks from news updates and social media. Read the Bible or another book to feed your own soul and think about how you can implement what you are reading into your life. Do whatever is needed to maintain wholeness and unwavering commitment to personal values and principles. Currently so much is uncertain: Instill hope and faith in others and in yourself. Heb. 11:1 (NIV) “Faith is confidence in what we hope for, and assurance about what we do not see.”

“Currently so much is uncertain: Instill hope and faith in others and in yourself.”

3. Emotional: (Soul). Take time to identify your emotions, decide what they mean and what you should do about it. Watch for opportunities to laugh. Humor really helps. Proverbs 17:22 says, “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.” Even if your meetings have moved to online platforms, be mindful of your boundaries. Decide when you are taking off your work hat and putting on your personal hat. It is especially important to keep up the boundaries between ministry and family life. Family time must be regarded as at least as important as church appointments. Too often family times are canceled, because someone else is demanding the Pastor’s attention with what is not necessarily an emergency. An important part of self-care is to clarify the expectations that the assembly has from the Pastor. If that is not dealt with adequately, it can become a stress factor to the Pastor, his/her family and the congregation. It might not currently be easy to have lunch with a friend, but one can still connect electronically or on the phone. Pastors should guard against isolation. Mentally and emotionally it is important to keep a routine of devotions, getting dressed, making the bed, etc. It provides some sense of consistency in a generally unpredictable work environment.

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4. Physical (Body). This is the area that comes most readily to mind when we think about self-care. It involves a healthy diet, regular exercise, adequate rest and sleep and a conscious effort to reduce stress. An important key in self-care is consistency. Most Pastors are not serious athletes but should train for long-term health. Exercise was part of everyday life in Biblical times. People walked far.
PASTORAL SELF-CARE cont.

They were farmers and herders. Some Pastors are averse to an off day because they feel guilty when they do something else than church work. A day of rest allows your body, soul, mind, and spirit to recharge and catch up with each other. Sleep is essential to optimal functioning and self-care. Although the amount of sleep needed changes through the seasons of our lives, it is normally between 6-8 hours.

Pastors are in a “helping profession” and are often the last to seek help for themselves. The pastor and his/her family just like any other family, has a right to be human and to seek help in counseling or other available resources. A Pastor who struggles with self-care should be encouraged to talk to a counsellor or professional that can assist in this important aspect of ministry.

“During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, faithful and caring Pastors are needed more than ever.”

During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, faithful and caring Pastors are needed more than ever. If Pastors fail at self-care, they certainly would not be effective in ministering to others. It is my prayer that all our Pastors will take good care of themselves all along their journey of ministry.


COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: UNDERSTANDING CHILD ABUSE

Ashley Theron (Acting CEO of AFM Welfare) - ashleyt@afmwelfare.org.za

I trust that the information and knowledge shared in this article will strengthen your role in preventing and identifying child abuse in your local community. I hope to guide you in what actions need to be taken should an alleged child abuse incident be reported to you as Pastor.

Child abuse is when a parent or caregiver, whether through action or failing to act, causes injury, death, emotional harm or risk of serious harm to a child. Younger children are abused most, and more girls suffer from neglect than boys. The most common forms of child abuse are: neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse and emotional abuse.

Neglect: Child neglect is the ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs and the most common form of child abuse. Child neglect encompasses abandonment, lack of appropriate supervision, failure to attend to
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: UNDERSTANDING CHILD ABUSE

necessary emotional or psychological needs and failure to provide necessary education, medical care, nourishment, shelter and/or clothing. The following is a list of signs and symptoms by which child neglect is identified:

• Has learning problems (or difficulty concentrating) that cannot be attributed to specific physical or psychological causes or misses attending school.
• Is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen.
• Lacks adult supervision.
• Is overly compliant, passive or withdrawn.
• Comes to school or other activities early, stays late or does not want to go home.

**Physical Abuse:** Physical abuse of a child is when a parent or caregiver causes any non-accidental physical injury to a child. Physical abuse includes striking, kicking, burning, biting, hair pulling, choking, throwing, shoving, whipping or any other action that injures a child. Signs of physical abuse in a child are:

• Bruises, blisters, burns, cuts and scratches.
• Internal injuries, brain damage, broken bones, sprains and dislocated joints.
• Visible and severe injuries that can lead to lifelong injury or even death.
• Unexplained or explained in a way that does not make sense.
• Frequency, timing and history of injuries (frequent after weekends, vacations, school absences).

**Emotional Abuse:** Emotional abuse is any type of abuse that involves the continual emotional mistreatment of a child. It is sometimes called psychological abuse. Emotional abuse can involve deliberately trying to scare, humiliate, isolate or ignore a child. Forms of emotional abuse include: (i) humiliating or constantly criticising a child, (ii) threatening or shouting at a child or calling them names, (iii) making the child the subject of jokes or using sarcasm to hurt a child, (iv) blaming, scaring, scapegoating and manipulating a child and (v) an absent parent, persistently ignoring and isolating the child. There might not be any obvious physical signs of emotional abuse or neglect. This means it can be difficult to tell if a child is being emotionally abused. But children who are emotionally abused might:

• Seem unconfident or lack self-assurance.
• Struggle to control their emotions.
• Difficulty making or maintaining relationships.
• Act in a way that is inappropriate for their age.

**Sexual Abuse:** When a child or young person is sexually abused, they are forced or tricked into sexual activities. They might not understand that what is happening is abuse. It is important for children to know that it is never their fault that they were sexually abused. Signs and symptoms of sexual abuse include:

• Changes in behaviour – a child may start being aggressive, withdrawn, clingy, have difficulties sleeping, have regular nightmares or start wetting the bed.
• Avoiding the abuser – the child may dislike or seem afraid of a particular person and try to avoid spending time alone with them.
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: UNDERSTANDING CHILD ABUSE cont.

- Sexually inappropriate behaviour – children who have been abused may behave in sexually inappropriate ways or use sexually explicit language.
- Physical problems – the child may develop health problems, including soreness in the genital and anal areas or sexually transmitted infections or they may become pregnant.
- Problems at school – an abused child may have difficulty concentrating and learning and their grades may start to drop.

What Can Pastors Do If A Child Reveals Abuse?
A child who is being neglected or abused might not realise what is happening is wrong - and they might even blame themselves. If a child talks to you about neglect or abuse it is important to listen carefully and note the following:

- Child’s name, address and telephone number.
- Parent’s or guardian’s name and telephone numbers.
- Reasons for concern, any documentation of indicators and any relevant statements made by the child.
- Affirm the child - tell them it is not their fault, let them know they did the right thing by telling you and explain what will happen next.
- Do not confront the alleged abuser, but report what the child has told you as soon as possible.
- Report the abuse to: Childline SA (Toll-free no. 080 005 5555) OR contact your nearest Department of Social Development office OR the nearest Child Protection Organisation (for example Child Welfare). In extreme cases, especially after hours, contact your nearest Police Station (SAPS).

This article is a good starting point for any Pastor who wishes to know and learn more about child abuse. We have a more elaborated article prepared where more detailed information is shared. The full article is available for from the AFM website for your reference: https://afm-ags.org/category/articles/. You are also welcome to send me any questions or feedback regarding the issue of child abuse: ashleyt@afmwelfare.org.za.

CONCLUSION
As always, I would like to receive your feedback on the contents of this Pastoral letter. I would also appreciate to hear how the coronavirus pandemic affects you, your family, and your congregation. I continue to keep you in my prayers. Your role in the AFM and in God’s Kingdom is greatly appreciated.

Blessings!
Past. M.G. Mahlobo