

## **RELIGION AND DISABILITY: A REFLECTION ON THE ROLE OF PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES IN CURBING MARGINALISATION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY IN ZIMBABWE.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

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Religions of the world view disability differently. Judaism, Islam and other Semitic religions regard it as a curse from God due to sins of either the parents or the individual. African Traditional Religion regards disability as a curse from the ancestors or the whole blame is cast on the mother of the disabled. *In Hinduism, disability is believed to be linked to "karma", sins that have been committed in past lives.* It is a punishment for misdeeds in the past lives of the People with Disability, or the wrongdoings of their parents. Buddhists believe that disability is a result of having done something negative in a former life. Most religions of the world construe disability as a result of sin. Christianity today has mixed feelings towards disability. Some denominations consider it to be a result of sin while others take it as a biological issue and has nothing to do with sin. Christianity is diverse hence it has diverse views on disability. It is against this background that this paper would like to reflect on the role of Pentecostal churches in curbing the marginalisation of people with disability. The paper would assess the initiatives of Pentecostal churches in addressing the issues of disability. Documentary analysis supported by interviews and personal observations shall be used to gather data for this paper.

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**Keywords:** disability, Pentecostal churches, marginalisation

### **Introduction**

The Christian community has a history of shrinking attitudes towards people with disabilities. Some denominations consider it to be a result of sin while others take it as a biological issue and has nothing to do with sin. Rather, Christianity is diverse hence it has diverse views on disability. This study discusses the role of Pentecostal churches in curbing the marginalisation of people with disability in Zimbabwe. The study is not only intended to provide a general snapshot of the status of disability in the Christian community but to also be used to identify specific areas in which Pentecostal churches can improve and champion the recognition of people with disability.

### **Definition of key terms**

Three basic terms are worth defining since they are central to this study. These are: disability, Pentecostal churches and marginalisation. Disability is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of an individual. Disabling conditions come in countless forms and have many causes which include, but are not restricted to birth, sickness and disease, the violence of others, accidents, sin and satanic activity, and the infirmities of advancing age. Disability is distinct from sickness and disease. Sickness and disease can often result in disabilities, but not all disabilities are caused by sickness and disease.

## **Pentecostal churches**

Pentecostal churches are a modern movement within Christianity that can be traced back to the Holiness movement in the Methodist Church. They are churches which focus on Holy Spirit baptism as evidenced by speaking in tongues. They thus emphasise on seeking the baptism of the Spirit as evidenced by speaking in tongues. Pentecostalism is a religious brand within Christianity that emerged at the dawn of the 20th century in America (Alexander, 2011). The term, Pentecost, is a Greek word prominent in the Old Testament to mean, Feast of Weeks. The Pentecost was a festival which occurred on the 50th day, some seven weeks after the Passover festival. In the New Testament, the Pentecost assumed a new dimension altogether. As Fr Ukpong (2008:3) has observed, Pentecost was celebrated in the church as the day on which the Holy Spirit descended (Acts 2) to manifest the fulfillment of the promise of Jesus (John16:7-13). In fact, the designation, Pentecostalism refers to the ‘spirit type’ churches, which derive their doctrine from Acts 2:1ff, which reads in part: ‘And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord...all of a sudden there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind...And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave utterance’. Accordingly, the doctrine of glossolalia which means the outpouring of the Holy Spirit expressed in speaking in other tongues, or also regarded as ‘baptism in the Holy Spirit’, is an indispensable aspect of Pentecostalism (Alexander, 2011).

Pentecostalism continues to surge across African countries with rapidity (Maxwell, 2006). Pentecostal Christianity continues to be popular largely on account of its liveliness in the way it tries to mitigate a plethora of existential realities which are aligned to transform humanity. Pentecostal churches can also be regarded as a renewal movement within Protestant Christianity that places special emphasis on a direct personal experience of God through the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Like other forms of evangelical Protestantism, Pentecostal churches adhere to the inerrancy of scripture and the necessity of accepting Christ as personal Lord and Saviour (Maxwell, 2006). It is distinguished by the belief in the baptism with the Holy Spirit as an experience separate from conversion that enables a Christian to live a Holy Spirit-filled and empowered life. This empowerment includes the use of spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues and divine healing which are two other defining characteristics of Pentecostalism (Alexander, 2011). Because of their commitment to biblical authority, spiritual gifts, and miracles, Pentecostals tend to see their movement as reflecting the same kind of spiritual power and teachings that were found in the Apostolic Age of the early church. For this reason, some Pentecostals also use the term Apostolic to describe their movement. Pentecostal churches believe that the "manifestations of the Holy Spirit" are alive, available, and experienced by modern-day Christians.

## **Marginalisation**

The term marginalisation refers to a process where a certain group of people is made to feel isolated and unimportant. It is a process where something or someone is pushed to the edge of a group and accorded lesser importance. The process is predominantly a social phenomenon by which a minority or sub-group is excluded, and their needs or desires ignored.

## **The Bible and disability**

The Bible has been used and interpreted differently by different church denominations. Some denominations speculate that God does not value persons with disabilities. They hold that God does not want such persons in spiritual leadership. They draw this erroneous interpretation of God's impartial love and compassion from Leviticus 21:17-23: *“For the generations to come none of your descendants [Aaron's] who has a defect may come near to offer the food of his God. No man who*

has any defect may come near: no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed; no man with a crippled foot or hand, or who is hunchbacked or dwarfed, or who has any eye defect, or who has *festering*".

The Bible is known to bear a long history of accommodating people with disability. Different scriptures have been used to substantiate this claim. After Moses met with God at the burning bush, the call to leadership followed immediately: –So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt (Exodus 3:10). After giving several reasons why he was not the man for the job, Moses complained, –O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue (Exodus 4:10). The sending of Moses who had a speech impairment to lead the Israelites out of Egypt is a sign that the Bible has a positive attitude towards people with disability. Stephen, the New Testament martyr, referred to Moses as being –powerful in speech (Acts 7:22). So, Moses was either unaware of his strength of speech, or he was downplaying his abilities. Through a series of questions, God reminded Moses that He determines human abilities and disabilities. The question which we may ask then is: Was Moses' claim to be –slow of speech and tongue a disability or a lack of confidence in his God-given ability? Either way, God had the answer: –Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord? (Exodus 4:11).

Job, the Old Testament faithful icon said, –Far be it from God to do evil, from the Almighty to do wrong (Job 34:10). God neither creates evil nor sends it on anyone. When He has to punish, it is loving correction (Hebrews 12:5, 6). God was saying to Moses, –As Creator of all life, even in a fallen world of sin and disabilities, I take loving responsibility for everyone. So, Moses, if you have a disability, I can take care of that too!

God imparts ability, and He knows about disability because He at least allows it. God said to Paul, the New Testament preacher: –My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

We find additional confirmation in other Scriptures. The Israelites were admonished to show kindness to those who were deaf and blind (Leviticus 19:14; Deuteronomy 27:18). Those who minister to the weak and helpless are blessed (Psalm 41:1). Jesus welcomed people with all manner of disabilities into the kingdom of God, even though they would have been excluded from service under the Old Testament. Matthew 4:23ff; 15:30 instructed how to treat people with disabilities: –Then Jesus said to his host, –When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous' (Luke 14:12-14). Countless healings in the Old and New Testaments provide proof of the compassionate nature of God, in spite of the fact that not all illnesses, diseases, or disabilities were removed. In Luke 19:1ff we have another example of how the Bible accommodates people with disability. Jesus in this chapter is said to have dinner with Zacchaeus who had height impairment. More to this, 1 Corinthians 12 advocates for an inclusive ecclesiology in which the church and its programmes should consider people with disability. Paul in the New Testament sets forth a theology of disability by noting that the weaker members of the body of Christ are vital to the functioning of the whole (Brookes, 2003:15). Paul, well acquainted with fragility, not only heeds Jesus' words that –power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12:9) but also challenges Corinthians' arrogance by placing the foolishness of God against their human wisdom and the weakness of God to shame their human strength (1 Cor 1:20-2:4). For Paul, the weakest members have a variety of gifts to share and God has chosen foolish things of the world to shame the wise (Kunz, 2011: 22).

Christ provided an example of servanthood that took ministry beyond miracles. People with disabilities are painfully aware that their condition and circumstances are often distasteful to others and that their lifestyle and behaviour are sometimes interpreted as being weird, abnormal, or bizarre (Reiders, 2008:5). They are also painfully aware that, as a result, people around them are often uncomfortable. Christ's example of humility, empathy, and servanthood teaches us that the

compassion of the Body must be greater than its need for comfort. Jesus took the dirt-encrusted feet of His disciples in His holy hands and washed them (Collins an & Ault, 2010: 30).

The best analogy in the Bible for reaching out and touching the lives of people with disabilities is washing feet. –You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them! (John 13:13-17).

So, the Bible clearly shows that during his ministry on earth, Jesus walked alongside all types of people, showing no partiality. He saw and regarded all people as bearers of the image of God and desired to share His Kingdom with everyone, especially those whom society deemed unworthy. For Pentecostal churches, God has mandated the entire Christian community to show no partiality in the body of Christ.

Yong (2010: 4-5) also cites the inauguration of Jesus’ ministry at Nazareth. Jesus reads from Isaiah and declares his own ministry to the poor, the weak and the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19). The cumulative effect of these biblical texts points to the participation of the marginalised in the kingdom of God. This implies that from the biblical perspective, people from all backgrounds and all walks of life should be invited and included into the essential functions of the church community.

### **The Christian community and disability**

The Christian community has a long history of negative attitudes towards people with disabilities. Eiesland (2009:240) reiterated that the church has too long provided ideological funding and charitable practices to people with disabilities which result in marginalisation. Eiesland (2009:243) further asserted that –Our bodies have too often been touched by hands that have forgotten our humanity and attend only to curing us...Healing has been the churchly parallel to rehabilitative medicine, in which the goal was ‘normalisation’ of the bodies of people with disabilities. This implies that the Christian community has a flawed focus on healing people with disability instead of accepting their condition. The church has to understand that people with disability are another brand of the image of God and have to be recognised in their own condition. Wolfensberger (1998:15-16) stated that people with disabilities are marginalised when society views them as an object of charity or as someone who is sick and needs to be healed. He further pointed out that the Christian community devalues people with disability by viewing them as the –other or –alien. This implies that the Christian community sees disability as a temporary affliction that must be endured to gain heavenly rewards. The Christian community has encouraged people with disability to acquiesce to social barriers as a sign of obedience to God and to internalise second- class status inside and outside the church.

Another, surprisingly common, marginalising thought the Christian community has with regards to people with disabilities is its supposed connection with sin. Reinders (2008:119) stated that the prevailing Roman Catholic view regards the life of a person with profound disabilities as a manifestation of natural evil. Satterlee (2010:34) stated that throughout its history, the Christian community has interpreted scriptural passages, images, and stories that include persons with disabilities in ways that subtly or explicitly reinforce the assertion that physical and developmental disabilities are caused by or are a consequence of sin and maybe God’s punishment has visited upon the sinner. This hermeneutical approach assumes that getting rid of their disabilities is the chief concern of people with disability and the ideal for all people. As noted above, historically, many churches believed that disabilities were caused by sin in an individual’s own life or their parent’s lives. Today, many authors will strongly argue against that theory. It is interesting to note, however, that these same authors who strongly believe disabilities are not caused by sin will argue that disabilities were in fact caused by the fall of man. For instance, Satterlee (2010:36), who previously argued against the notion that disability is caused by sin, goes on to say, –I hold that disabilities are a consequence of the fallen state of creation... Hull (2003:11) also comments that although people

with disabilities may not have necessarily sinned or brought their condition upon themselves, –their very existence is a continual reminder of the imperfect human condition into which humanity has fallen and from which we hope to be redeemed.

Kabue (2006:115) provides us with a grim outlook on what the mind set of connecting disability with sin can do to the church and people with disability. He posited that the continued interpretation and belief among some churches that there is a relationship between disability or sickness and sin has led to the development of an attitude of pity and sympathy to those who are disabled or sick. To those who hold this view, the presence of people with disabilities in the church is a sign that the church is unable to combat the devil, which is the source of those infirmities. The response to this is endless prayers for those who are disabled or sick, and when these prayers do not yield the expected result the victim is blamed for having no faith. The consequence is that, more often than not, persons with disabilities feel alienated, marginalised, embarrassed and, in some cases, offended by the treatment meted out to them by the Christian community.

In other Christian denominations like the African Initiated Churches and other protestant churches, a person with a history of disability cannot become a reverend, father or priest. They even terminate the services of a member of a family with such history. It is because of this reason that a person with disability prefers Pentecostal churches like Assemblies of God Africa (AOGA), Family of God (FOG), Pentecostal Church of Zimbabwe (PCZ), Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM), Heartfelt International Ministries (HIM), where they are received with love and respect in spite of their disability. These churches are of the opinion that Jesus repudiates the conception of disability as a consequence of sin and they believe that disability is God's creative mark. It is his divine embodiment hence people need to recognise those with disability in the way God has made them. Generally, the Christian community has a history of marginalising people with disability. However, this is no longer the case in Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe today. Many Pentecostal churches have taken initiatives in accommodating people with disability in the way God created them. The following section is a discussion on the role of Pentecostal churches in curbing marginalisation of people with disability in Zimbabwe.

### **Pentecostal churches and disability in Zimbabwe**

Despite the marginalisation and attitude of the Christian community, Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe are taking steps towards accepting people with disability. Satterlee (2010:37) stated that –rather than turning to a handy list of do's and don'ts, congregations must dare to engage persons with disabilities#. Pierson (2010:182) supports Satterlee as he writes, –Over the years of urging churches to include people with disabilities, I have come to believe that it is not the mechanics or the process that makes it happen. It is the attitude of the people that makes it happen#. Webb-Mitchell (2010:257) clearly pointed that members of the Christian community need to be educated to understand the God-given gifts of people with disabilities, and the necessity of adapting to the presence of people with disabilities#. Similarly, Meininger (2008) argued that we must be able to abandon our traditions and rituals for the sake of inclusion. We must liberate ourselves from our own domestication and accommodate people with disability in our churches. Yong (2010:89) shares three principles of an inclusive congregation: (1) the church consists of the weak, not the strong which puts people with disabilities at the center instead of the margins of what it means to be the people of God; (2) each person with disabilities, no matter how severe, contributes something essential to and for the body of Christ; (3) people with disabilities become the paradigm for what it means to live in the power of God and to manifest the divine glory. In Zimbabwe, while other Christian denominations reject, condemn and marginalise people with disability, Pentecostal churches are starting to make strides to love and serve people with disability. People with disability are regarded as humans for whom Christ died, qualifying them for ministry. They are humans who embody a unique mark of the image of God.

One of the disabled in Assemblies of God Church reiterated that Pentecostal churches like Assemblies of God have been humbled by the opportunity to come to value people with disability. He further said that most people think that the value of a human being can be measured by salary, educational achievements and leadership positions. They think that such success in life comes because they have earned it and others need to work harder in both matters of faith and financial status. For him, the Assemblies of God has no such partiality. People with disability are valued and are given positions in the church like ushering, teaching, preaching and any sort of church position.

In contrast to other traditional notions of Christian ministry, Pentecostal churches like Apostolic Faith Mission emphasise that all members of the body of Christ are empowered by the Holy Spirit to witness to and accomplish the work of God in the world. In the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) people with disability are even trained as pastors. Typical examples include Pastor Musasa in Mutare who is crippled, Pastor Mangwiwo who is blind and Pastor Chimukutira in Chiredzi who has one hand. All these imply that the Apostolic Faith Mission is doing a lot to accommodate people with disability. People with disability in AFM are enabled socially, publicly and practically in the work of the Holy Spirit.

In the history of Pentecostal churches like ZAOGA/ FIF there are great men and women of God whose exploits have been heralded and rehearsed. ZAOGA has established homes for people with disability and in this community everyone matters because everyone was created in the image of God. People with disability are appreciated for who they are and the gift they bring to the community. This implies that ZAOGA has taken initiatives to appreciate the lives and gifts of all people regardless of class, condition or ability. The ZAOGA church is guided by 11 Samuel 9 where we have the story of King David's kindness to Mephibosheth who was lame in his feet. They said David provided food and shelter for Mephibosheth and thus the church today is mandated to do the same to people with disability. The Disabled Helping Hand Association is one of the many ministries under FIFMI, which was established in June 1992 in Zimbabwe by Archbishop Dr. Ezekiel H. Guti. The ministry preaches the gospel of Jesus Christ to the less fortunate, and the disabled individuals.

In an interview Pastor Madzivadondo said the association was established as a result of Dr. Guti's burden to win all souls to Jesus Christ. For him, many times the people with disability are forgotten when it comes to the gospel. Dr. Guti believes that the rightful place for people with disability is in the body of Christ. The association also seeks to improve the relationship between people with disability and people with ability and to raise awareness on issues of HIV/AIDS among the disabled persons, while at the same time providing biblical solutions he postulated.

In an interview with Pastor Musoni also said in ministering to the physically handicapped, the association also reaches out to people who are deaf, and have other disabilities. In addition, the gospel is being preached to those affected by cerebral palsy, convulsive disorders, seizures, polio myelitis, and muscular dystrophy, among others. The Disabled and Helping Hands Association (DHHA) is funded by donations from churches and individuals. While preaching to people with disability, Dr. E.H. Guti also encourages people with abilities to be engaged in income generating and self help projects. The Disabled Helping Hand Association has a piece of land in Zimbabwe at Mukondomi School, 10 kilometers from Murambinda Growth Point, along Nyazura Road. The land was donated by Buhera Rural District Council.

This piece of land is being developed and the association completed the construction of a multi-purpose hall, caretaker's cottage, tuck shop, and accommodation block. The name of the center is Ezekiel Guti Disabled Village. At this village, individuals in the tuck shop. At Murambinda Growth Point, the association has a cloakroom, and also providing typing services. It is the aim of the Association to equip the whole (total) man, spiritually, and physically.

According to Pastor Ganda, there is an encouraging response towards the association from many

people who have been reached by this organisation. The organisation plans to spread to other nations in Africa and the world promoting recognition and acceptance of people with disability. Interesting to note is the fact that the Association has three Pastors with disability who are working full time. They travel to different places to inform their members and other people with disability about HIV AIDS. The Pastors were trained at AMFCC College for two years on the Bible and leadership.

In an interview Pastor Utedzi reiterated that through the initiatives by ZAOGA church people with disabilities say religious groups should be educated on their belief that disability is not linked to evil spirits. She further reiterated that there is need for a series of awareness for the pastors and church leaders so that they appreciate that people with disability are not there for charity. –You would agree with me that churches believe that disability is related to evil spirits|| she said. She said, –You hear most of the churches advertizing that if you come to their church people with disability will be healed,|| This is not right because people need to understand the condition of people with disability. Pastor Utedzi said that in ZAOGA plans are underway to engage church leaders in Zimbabwe and tell them that people with disability are not charitable cases|.

In Zimbabwe there are cases where marriages broke after a woman gave birth to a disabled baby. Communities have also accused each other of witchcraft after the birth of a baby with disability, with relatives turning on each other over the same issue. So, for Pastor Utedzi cultural issues and mindset also affect people with disabilities through stigma and marginalisation. To curb cultural marginalisation of people with disability ZAOGA church is creating platforms for young people with disabilities to participate in socio-economic and political processes. Pastor Utedzi here stated that:

We train youths with disabilities on leadership and good governance, lobby for reform in areas of the law that discriminates or works to the disadvantage of young people with disabilities.

She further said that:

We also wish to mobilise young people with disabilities to be registered voters that can vote and be voted for and enhance their participation in public issues. This cannot, of course, happen if we do not invest in research on barriers that hinder the meaningful participation of young women with disabilities in decision making processes.

So, in Pentecostal churches like ZAOGA initiatives have been taken to make sure that doors are open to everyone. Responding to and fully accommodating people with disabilities are not an option for the churches in Zimbabwe. It is the church's defining characteristic (EDAN, 2003:20). Despite the tremendous work that ZAOGA is doing, it has to be noted that it has to be in tune with major developments which are taking place in the issues to do with disability. The name that the church is using for its organisation which helps people with disability is inappropriate. Terms like Disabled Helping Hand Association and Ezekiel Guti Disabled Village seem to be derogatory in nature. Proponents of disability studies are calling for the use of terms which are accommodating rather than discriminating and marginalising.

In an interview Pastor Shamuyarira of AFM said that the church should be a place where parents and children with disabilities can attend without feeling inferior, without being stared at and without being silently condemned. This concurs with what Hauerwas (2004: 59) and Yong (2009:175) confirmed when they posited that people with disabilities find redemption from disability not when they are healed but with the removal of societal barriers which hinder those with able bodies from welcoming and being hospitable to people with disabilities. AFM calls church organisations and congregations to recognise that with regard to the work of Christ in the world and within our lives,

there is no difference between a person with a disability and a person without a disability.

Pierson (2010:184) argued that when church leaders search for a biblical mandate to be involved in disability ministry, they need to look no further than the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20) which states that Christians are to go into the entire world and spread the message of Christ's love to everyone. For him, there is no footnote which brackets out people with disability in the great commission. This implies that everyone is accommodated in the Christian community. This is the stand that AFM is taking as it tries to accommodate people with disability. Webb- Mitchell (1996:51) commented that –one's mental, physical, or sensory condition is neither a help nor a hindrance in relationship to God. Bach, (as cited in Kunz, 2011; 104) stated that:

People with and without disability: Both are respectively created by God; both live in the fallen creation; both are dependent on the salvific deed of Christ; both are reconciled to God through Christ; both are members of the body of Christ, both deficient and dependent upon others; both gifted with divine gifts, both are expectant of salvation. Where, exactly, is the theological distinction?

This is the trend in AFM where Pastor Chitauru said that they are guided by the dictum that disability is not inability. At its theological colleges called Living Waters Theological Seminary in Harare and Bread of Life Campus in Gwanda, AFM teaches people with disabilities in regular classes. This is done to value and display the supremacy of God in disability and suffering said Pastor Chitauru. On the same note, Pastor Chikumbo said that in his class in 2013 at Bread of Life Campus they were learning together with Farai Mutongerera from Chiredzi in Masvingo who was blind and he completed his studies very well. Other pastors with disability in AFM include K. Gangata, Mrs Chitauru and pastor Ishe who are greatly used by God. The people accept them in their conditions and are well respected as preachers of the word of God.

Pentecostal churches thus have accommodated people with disabilities better than any other church community. In an interview Pastor Dura of AFM said that the church of Jesus Christ which is the earthly representative of spiritual reality, should be the leader in providing opportunity for all people to connect with the Spirit of God. He further said that as a church we need to fully understand the age of accountability and its application to people with disabilities. We should understand how people with disability relate to God. We also must give opportunity for the Spirit of God to speak to such a person at his or her level of comprehension. All this boils down to the contention that disability is not inability.

For Pentecostal churches like AFM individuals with disabilities can be mainstreamed in traditional schools to participate in emotional and social experiences with their peers. In an interview Pastor Majoni said –People with disability can demonstrate an unusual level of creativity in artistic expression. Many grasp spiritual realities and participate in worship and other church activities, especially in smaller groups. For this reason, Pastor Majoni said that the church should provide such activities as poultry, piggery and sewing projects for people with disability. He said that the key to understanding and working with people with disabilities is building relationships with them. For him, developing friendship and trust encourages them to open up to the love of the community. For Majoni, the initiatives of AFM in so far as disability is concerned fulfill the words of Jesus: –I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me (Matthew 25:35,36).

The Family of God Church also has initiatives for providing for people with disability. They provide consultation, multi-media resources and advocate for people with disability. They contact disability awareness crusades to help the human community at large to accommodate and take people with

disabilities in their condition. They sensitise the community not pity the condition of people with disability by accepting who they are. In an interview Pastor Muchena reiterated that the Family of God (FOG) church is also in a bid to form communities for people with disability concerns so as to establish a ministry to address them. She further said that as a church they are creating a full participation of people with disability in the spiritual, educational and communal activities and provide resources for such moves. Apart from all these, FOG provides consultative assistance to other Christian congregations wishing to make their churches accessible to people with disabilities. They also provide for the educational needs of people with disabilities. FOG is also in a bid to organise conferences to discuss challenges facing people with disability and how to solve them.

Pastor Masuku posited that the family which is the basic social unit in all societies plays an important role in meeting the basic human needs of people with disability. She said that the community and churches at large have a role to play. For her, community sensitisation and awareness improves the interaction between the society and people with disability and in the process this rebuilds the lives and identities of people with disability. She also said that through community awareness values and beliefs towards people with disability are changing and this is enabling people with disability to participate fully in the community. For her, traditional beliefs and culture influence the behaviour of people towards people with disability hence if people are sensitised on the wholeness of people with disability that they have emotions, needs and human rights and therefore worthy of respect and dignified treatment, cultural and traditional beliefs about these people will be dropped. So, for FOG, constant education and sensitisation of the general public on the rights of persons with disability improve their lives.

## **Recommendations**

The biblical command to –serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13) includes everyone. To view people with disabilities as flawed and defective, and possibly a divine mistake, is wrong for a church with Christ-like compassion. People with disabilities are not platforms for the demonstration of power to heal. The Christian community needs to affirm and minister to those with disabilities and at the same time encouraging their congregational acceptance into church life and activity. If the Christian community is to fulfil the Great Commission to preach the gospel to –every creature (Mark 16:15, NKJV), they need to take different initiatives to accommodate people with disability.

The Christian community’s ministry to people with disabilities has to change and emulate what Pentecostal churches are doing in Zimbabwe. The barriers to social integration of people with disability are caused by lack of information. There is no information for and on people with disability for the general public including families of such persons. There is need for access to television, radio, internet, newspaper and educative films by people with disability. Such sensitisation would help the community at large to accommodate the conditions of people with disability. Families and the general public need to be informed and educated on disability, the causes and the proper treatment available for such people. This would help families to accept their relatives into their communities. Also this would eliminate rejection into the society and Christian community of people with disability. There is generally poor legal framework for people with disability in Zimbabwe. The traditional attitudes and cultural beliefs towards people with disability are still strong in other church organisations hence there is need of policies which fully support the conditions of people with disability.

The responsibility of the Christian community at large as representatives of the kingdom of God is to include those with disabilities in church functions and worship. Other churches need to reserve easily accessible pews or aisle seats for people with disability and this will give them liberty and it sends the message that the church wants to worship with people with disability. Ushers trained to show

kindness to worshipers with disabilities and to their caregivers demonstrate the seriousness of the church's concern. Discipling and equipping people with disabilities to use their gifts to build up the body of Christ should also be a responsibility of the church's commission.

Pentecostal churches that have already taken initiatives in accommodating people with disability should also train other Christian denominations on how to do the same. The church must open up to people with disabilities as some Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe are doing.

### **Conclusion**

People with disabilities are essential to the wholeness of the Christian community. In a culture that worships physical perfection, devalues human life, and takes pride in disposability, the church must protect the helpless, vulnerable, disenfranchised, including people with disabilities. They are people created in God's image, possessing dignity, value, and purpose. This paper has managed to give glimpses of the role of Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe in curbing the marginalisation of people with disability. The paper gave insightful activities that Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe are doing to accommodate people with disability.

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