

**A Theological Reflection on the place of Elderly People in the Zambian
Christian Context**

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by

Chewe Mulenga

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Prof. Dr. M.N. Walton

Second examiner
Prof. Dr. F. De Lange

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Abbreviations

AU	African Union.
CCZ	Council of Churches in Zambia.
CSO	Central Statistical Office.
UN	United Nations.
UNICEF	United Nation International Children's Emergency Fund.
PEC	Presbytery Executive Committee.
RCZ	Reformed Church in Zambia.
LCMS	Living Conditions Monitoring Survey.
SCAZ	Senior Citizens Association of Zambia.
SEC	Synod Executive Committee.
WPA	World Population Ageing.
WPP	World Population Prospects.

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Chapter 1: Introduction.

1.1. Exemplary case

Elderly people in the Zambian society have been much despised. In many Zambian societies, being aged has always been connected to practicing witchcraft. In my ministry as a pastor in a small town of Luanshya on the Copperbelt Province, I have encountered a number of accusations against the aged. The aged have for a long time also felt neglected in society. Due to economic challenges, some have been struggling to make both ends meet.

The church has not been an exception in dealing with these issues concerning the aged. Even in the church most of the aged feel unaccommodated and not cared for by church members and leadership. One day when I was doing my normal routine of house visitation programmes, some old women simply asked to have some time with me to discuss some issues concerning their lives. I gave them the opportunity to talk and this is what they said;

“You are our Musogoleri (pastor) and we are very proud of you. You are the only father we have and rely upon, but it is like you have also neglected us. The only place we expect to be welcomed and treated well is the church. Most of us as old people relied on our children for support, but some of them have neglected us while others have died hence creating a challenge for our lives. If we look at the members in the community, no one seems to be ready to welcome us and even visit us, because we are old and evil. The community does not seem to care for us and even in the church we feel we are no longer important, because there we go through the same experiences as in the community. Even in the church, there are people who view and see us as witches, so that our relevance in the church is questioned. We have been accused of being evil people by the community. In short, we do not feel as if we belong to the church any more. Our only hope is that the church protects us, especially through you as our musogoleri.”¹

As their pastor, I appreciated them for being open and sharing with me their concerns and I assured them that I would look for a way of addressing their concerns. However, their concerns brought concerns within my heart. I realised that for them to come forward like that, it must be

¹ ‘Musogoleri’ is a chewa term meaning leader

an issue that has been something troubling them for a long time. Their concerns also made me see that there is much that has to be done for them.

During home visitation in the same period, one of my section elders also narrated to me the story of certain man who was suspected of having killed all his children through the use of witchcraft. This man lost all his children and now lived all by himself. The section elder advised me not to visit this man because he was a witch. Even some of the church members in the section do not visit him because they, too, are afraid of losing their lives. Despite the elder's advice, I still went ahead and visited the old man. Surprisingly, he was very happy to receive me at his residence. He could not believe that I visited him. I did my usual sharing of the word of God with the man. He was encouraged that even the team of leaders took time to visit him. As we were about to leave, he requested some private time with me because he had something to share with me. I gave him the opportunity and he said:

Abusa mwachita bwino kubwela². I have a lot of things to share with you. First of all, I do not have any children to take care of me. I lost all my four children and people accused me of having killed all my children. My family members have all neglected me and accuse me of being a witch. My wife, the only person I relied on, ran away from me and I do not know where she is now. She left me one year ago, and I live by myself. Life has been very bad and rough for me. I survive by the mercy of people who can remember me with some food and some clothes. You can have a look at how I am looking; even my clothes can tell that I am really struggling. I really look to the church for help, but the church does not seem to be helping me. Even you, Abusa, you rarely visit me to check on how I am doing in this life. I feel you have also neglected me. I look forward to you visiting me regularly so that you understand more of what most people of my age go through in life. Above all thank you for taking time to visit me and listen to my concerns."

In this conversation, I noticed similar concerns with those of the women. And in their understandings, they see the minister as a focal point for dealing with their concerns and accusations.

² Abusa is a chewa term and it means Minister/Shepherd of the flock.

It is from this background that I draw motivation to write this thesis for the sake of theological reflection on the place of the elderly in the Zambian Christian context. The research paper will look at the situation of elderly people with the aim of reflecting on how they have been regarded and treated in the Christianity community in Zambia. It will also look at how the church can best change negative perceptions about the aged in order to set an example to those in the society.

1.2. Defining the core concepts

For a clearer understanding of these terms it is important to define them. An important term is that of the 'elderly'. The best way to understand this is to also ask a question: who are the elderly? Writing from an American Koepke names three different types of elderly people: the active, the transitional and the frail.³ According to Koepke, all three types of elderly people need pastoral care but the care needed varies from one type to another. Writing from a Zambian perspective, Kamwengo states that aging is the process in which an individual experience a number of changes in their physiological, psychological and functional life⁴. According to this definition, the aged are those people who have become less actively involved in most of life's activities due to the changes they have undergone. Other scholars define aging from four different perspectives: the physiological, psychological, sociological and chronological. However, the different perspectives will be explored further in chapter two in a very comprehensive manner.

1.3. Research title

'A theological reflection on the place of the elderly people in the Zambian Christian context.'

1.4. Research focus

³ Donald R. Koepke (ed.), *Ministry to the older adults: the building block*. Birmingham: Haworth Pastoral place, 2005, p.7-8

⁴ Martin M Kamwengo, *Growing old in Zambia: Old and New perspectives*. New Delhi: Sterling Internal, 2001, p. 1-3

The main focus of this research is exploring ways by which the elderly can be taken care of, honoured and respected in the church and in society at large. This will be done by evaluating how the elderly are regarded in Zambian society and then proposing theological and pastoral approaches for honouring the elderly.

1.4.1. Problem statement

Globally, elderly people have occupied a special place in society. They have often been respected and valued. In Zambia, as in many African societies, they were formerly regarded highly as custodians of tradition and values of life.⁵ They were greatly respected for their level of acumen and skilfulness. For example, when one wanted to marry, he or she would go to someone who was elderly to be taught about marriage. The elderly fulfilled their responsibility as advice-givers. If people within the community had a problem, they would seek counsel from elderly persons. What is more, elderly persons worked as agents of peace building and reconciliation in the community.⁶ Whenever people had differences or disputes, the elderly would be invited to assist in settling their disputes and resolving the conflicts. They made sure peace prevailed in the family and in the community at large.

The elderly also played a major role in strengthening extended family systems. Consequently, issues of poverty and lack of care were not very common experiences of the elderly people because the extended families would give a helping hand. For instance, an old man in the community was considered a father of all, while an old woman was considered a mother of all people. It did not matter whether one was connected to them biologically or not.⁷

⁵ Martin M Kamwengo, *Growing old in Zambia: Old and New perspectives*. New Delhi: Sterling Internal, 2004, p.17

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Along the way, the respect and the high status which the elderly enjoyed in the society dropped due to globalisation and modernization.⁸ In the past years, we have seen a rise in the number of elderly people being abused psychologically, mentally, economically and socially.⁹

Accusations of witchcraft against elderly people is a common phenomenon in most African countries. Some elderly people have been killed by others on the accusation of practicing witchcraft. At the same time, some have ended up being abandoned or neglected by their relatives. Consequently, the elderly experience loneliness and their self-esteem is affected.¹⁰

There have been a number of awareness programmes run by the Zambian government. The church, although being well placed as an institution to take the plight of the elderly people seriously, has not done much. The church has hardly responded theologically to the vice that even in the church some elderly people feel side-lined. Traces of the negative experiences they encounter in the society are also observable in the church.

In light of this situation the researcher takes it to be an opportunity to respond to the problem. In this vein, research is vital in order to develop specialised ministries for the elderly.

1.4.2. Research question

The main question on which the research will focus is:

What is the place of the elderly people in the Zambian Christian context?

The sub questions are:

1.4.2.1 What is aging and what challenges do elderly people face?

1.4.2.2. What are the cultural and social perceptions on elderly people?

1.4.2.3 What are biblical understandings of aging?

1.4.2.4. What approach can be used to accommodate the elderly in the life of the church and in society at large?

⁸ Jotham, Dhemba, *Overcoming poverty in Old age: Social security provision in Lesotho, South Africa, and Zimbabwe*. International Social Work 56, no. 6 (2012): 820

⁹ Martin M Kamwengo, *Elderly in South Africa: Issues, Challenges and Future Prospects*. New Delhi: Sterling Internal, 2002, p.75

¹⁰ Kamwengo, *Growing old in Zambia: Old and New perspectives*, p. 9

1.5. Relevance of the research

The research is very relevant to the church because it will suggest ways of creating a platform where elderly people are appreciated and taken care of by the church and by society at large. It will also challenge relevant authorities to understand the plight of elderly people and to approach them with a human face. In scholarly respect, the findings will be useful in the field of pastoral gerontology.

1.6. Justification of the study

This research is of academic importance in that those who interested in research in a similar field will find this research helpful. There are a number of scholars who have written on the subject of the elderly, especially from the Zambian perspective. One great scholar worth mentioning is Martin Kamwengo. He has written a number of books such as '*Growing old in Zambia: Perspectives and Issues*' and '*Ageing and elderly in Zambia: Perspectives and Issues*'. His focus was mainly sociological. His literature lacks a theological perspective in relation to gerontology. This research will therefore take the path of pastoral gerontology because the researcher wants to find ways of how the elderly people can be honoured and respected in church and society.

The researcher acknowledges the fact that social gerontological research has been done, but that no one has written on this topic in the Reformed Church in Zambia from this perspective. Therefore, with this in mind, the research will be of use for the Zambian Christian context and particularly, for the Reformed Church and the scholarly world at large.

1.7. Research methodology and Theoretical Framework

This study relies mainly on secondary data; hence literature analysis will be a main source of data. This will include books, articles and journals on theology and gerontology. The study will enhance our knowledge of the place of the elderly in the Reformed Church in Zambia. The internet was consulted to access information published by different organizations in relation to the subject. Articles and online publications were used in this paper.

The researcher prepared and sent questionnaires to strategic persons, especially ministers, in the Reformed Church in the Zambian. However, only a few responded. In addition to that, phone interviews were conducted with strategic ministers. All the data that was gathered was coded, analysed, is presented here. As the results of the fact that the empirical data that was collected to a great degree concurred with the literature, the empirical findings will not be treated separately, but in continuous relation to the literature.

Chapter 2: Aging and Challenges of the elderly people

2.1. What is aging?

Aging is a process whereby people accumulate years and progressively experience changes in their biological, social and psychological functioning as they move through different phases in the course of life.¹¹ Scholars in the field of gerontology¹² state that there are four perspectives on aging: biological, psychological, chronological and sociological aging.

The first aspect of aging is biological. This is also called 'senescence' which has much to do with the declining of a cell or organism due to aging.¹³ What is more, biological events which occur progressively impair the physiological system so that the organism becomes less able to withstand disease, ultimately increasing proneness to death.¹⁴ Medeiros states that aging centres on the organism and the correlations linking time and change.¹⁵ For instance, as people age, they begin to develop wrinkled skin and their hair begins to look grey while some develop bald heads.¹⁶ However, it has to be noted that there is considerable interindividual variation, as people do not age in identical manners.¹⁷ Therefore, there is no strict connection between biological aging and chronological age because chronological age does not tell much about a specific individual.¹⁸ Other physiological and functional hallmarks include a gradual reduction in height, a lower metabolic rate, longer reaction times and decreased sexual activity, though this is more prevalent in women.¹⁹ It is these physiological changes which render some susceptible to diseases. Medeiros adds that women usually experience menopause. In the same vein, Harris points out that in the Bible growing old brought about some physiological changes such as loss

¹¹ Judith Philips et al., *Key concepts in Social Gerontology*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010, p.12

¹² Gerontology is defined as the study of aging from biological, psychological and social perspectives.

¹³ Ibid., p.22

¹⁴ Philips et al., *Key concepts in Social Gerontology*, p 12

¹⁵ Kate, De Medeiros., *The short Guide to aging and Gerontology*. Bristol: Policy Press, 2017, p. 4.

¹⁶ Gordon V Harris, *Biblical Perspectives on Aging: God and the Elderly*. New York: Haworth Press, 2008, p.56

¹⁷ De Medeiros., *The short Guide to aging and Gerontology*, p.5.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Hamilton., *An introduction to Gerontology*, p.285

of hearing and sight (Gen.27:1-2).²⁰ Aging can, therefore, be defined as an inherent, inexorable and unalterable process of losing capability and of undergoing an increase in vulnerability.²¹ This means that aging is something which cannot be avoided because everyone will go through it at some point.

Psychological aging means that the personality and mental functioning of an individual undergoes some changes in the sensory and perceptual processes.²² One of the most common features of psychological aging is the presence of forgetfulness.²³ When an individual begins to be forgetful, it is often taken to be a sign of aging. This assertion does not hold in a general sense as even younger people can sometimes be forgetful. According to a survey which was undertaken in America, it was discovered that most American who were 50 years and older considered Alzheimer's disease as more dreadful than cancer. This means that they feared losses of memory as they age.²⁴ The reason is that they did not want to associate themselves with forgetfulness.

Arguably, some scholars state that psychological aging does not only come with memory loss but also with gains in wisdom.²⁵ The wisdom that comes with old age is imbedded in the ability of elderly people to make sound judgements about life based on their experiences in life. Verhaeghen agrees that aging has some psychological effects on the aging person but points out that wisdom is not always related to age. According to him, there are young people who are wise as well as seniors people who are unwise.²⁶ His view seems to suggest that it is not adequate to define aging from the perspective of wisdom.

Generally, however, wisdom in later life cannot be disputed. Based on their experience in life,

²⁰ Gordon V Harris, *Biblical Perspectives on Aging: God and the Elderly*, p.55

²¹ Hamilton., *An introduction to Gerontology*, p.21

²² Ibid, p. 13

²³ Ibid, p.13

²⁴ Ian Stuart-Hamilton., *An introduction to Gerontology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p.159.

²⁵ De Medeiros., *The short Guide to aging and Gerontology*, p.42

²⁶ Hamilton., *An introduction to Gerontology*, p.184.

elderly people tend to have a balanced view of life.²⁷ Their wisdom can be categorized in three different perspectives and these include the aptitude to understand the deeper significance of life, a reflective dimension and diminished self-centeredness.²⁸ The elderly will concentrate on the most important things in life and will have less time to experiment with certain things in life.²⁹

Sociological aging refers to changes in the roles and responsibilities elderly people experience in society. Society defines the roles and responsibilities of the elderly.³⁰ As they navigate divergent segments of their life, changes occur in their responsibilities. Lodge states that social perceptions of aging also affect how other people talk about and behave towards older people.³¹ In social aging, normative anticipations based on the social and cultural environments, shape an individual. . What is more, ‘sociological aging begins when an individual is no longer able to maintain some stated proportion of achievements of the average adult in his or her culture.’³²

Finally, chronological aging is usually defined by the number of years a person should have reached to be considered old.³³ Chronological age also offers individuals the means of classifying functions and relationships in terms of the behaviour and prospects that are linked to dissimilar chronological groupings. Even in the Bible, there have been varying definitions of chronological aging. Though we have people like Moses who lived 120 years, Joshua 110 years, Job 140 years, and the high priest Jehoiada who lived 130 years (2 Chronicles.24:15), it is not still very clear what age was considered to be, but the Harris suggests that old age could begin after 60 years.³⁴

Chronological aging is a universally accepted form of defining old age, even though there are

²⁷ De Medeiros., *The short Guide to aging and Gerontology*, p.42

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Philips et al., *Key concepts in Social Gerontology*, p 12

³¹ Caroline Lodge et al., *The New Age of Ageing: How Society needs to change*. Bristol: Policy Press, 2016, p.30

³² De Medeiros., *The short Guide to aging and Gerontology*, p.7

³³ Ibid, p. 31

³⁴ Gordon V Harris, *Biblical Perspectives on Aging: God and the Elderly*, p.55

variations from one context to the other. For instance, during the 1970s, chronological age in Zambia was divided into two categories. Women were considered older when they reached the age of 40, while for men it was at 55 years.³⁵

Globally, 60 years and above is a common chronological age which is employed. Zambia, being a member of the United Nations and the African Union, adopted 60 years and above as a criterion for defining elderly people.³⁶ A chronological definition of aging will be used in the entire paper as the yardstick for looking at elderly people.

2.2 Population Aging

Philips defines population aging as, ‘An unprecedented change in the demographic makeup of the world’s population marked by a shift towards an increase in both the proportions and number of older people in relation to other age groups.’³⁷ Internationally, the world is experiencing growth in the population of older people aged 60 years and over. In 1950, there were only 205 million people in the world aged 60 years or more. China, America, and India each accounted for more than 10 million of those in that age group category. By the year 2000, there was an increase from 205 million to 606 million people, representing a percentage growth of 34%. The number of countries which had more than 10 million number of elderly people grew from three to 12.³⁸

Globally, the number of older persons aged 60 years and above is estimated to grow from 901 million to 1.4 billion by 2015 with a percentage growth of 56%. Furthermore, the growth is expected to double in size by 2050 to 2.4 billion. Between 2015 and 2030, Latin America and the Caribbean are projected to be the first regions to experience a rapid population growth of older person aged 60 years at a growth rate of 71%. The other regions with faster population growth

³⁵ Martin M Kamwengo, *Growing old in Zambia: Old and New Perspectives*. New Delhi: Sterling Internal, 2004, p.25

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Judith Philips et al., *Key concepts in Social Gerontology*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010, p.122

³⁸ United Nations, *World Population Aging 2015*, http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WPA2015_Report.pdf (accessed May 4,2017)

include Asia at 66%, Africa at 64%, Oceania at 47%, North America 41% and Europe showing the least at 23%.³⁹

Another striking illustration based on the report is that in 2015, one in eight people in the world was aged 60 years and over. It was also projected that one out of six persons in the world would be aged 60 years and above by 2030. What is more, the number of children aged between 0-9 years will not exceed the number of older people aged 60 years and above by 2030.⁴⁰ Interestingly, the population of older people aged 60 years and above will be more than the number of young people aged 10 -24 years.⁴¹ This means that the number of elderly people is expected to grow globally in an unprecedented manner.

Africa, has also been experiencing population growth. The continent is expected to experience rapid growth in the population of older people, especially in its northern and southern regions. A United Nations report states that Africa's population is estimated to be around 1 billion. According to the African Development Bank report, elder persons aged 65 years and above represented a 3.6% of this population 2010, a total of 36 million persons.⁴² The United Nations reports that from 2010-2015, the rate of population growth of older persons was at 3% of the total population. The estimations indicate the population of elderly people will represent 4.5% of the total population by 2030 and 10% by 2050.⁴³ Especially in the second half of the century lower fertility rates contributed to this projected growth.⁴⁴ Similarly, the percentage of people aged 60 years and above is 4.9 percent of the total population and it is likely grow higher to about 7.6% by the year 2050. The United Nations also projected that there will be a tripling

³⁹ United Nations, *World Population Aging 2015*, http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WPA2015_Report.pdf (accessed May 4,2017)

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Alice Nabalamba, *Aging Population challenges of Africa*, Africa Economic Brief, November 2011, <https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/Aging%20Population%20Challenges%20in%20Africa-distribution.pdf> (accessed May 4, 2017).

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

ingrowth from 64 million in 2015 to 220 million in 2050.⁴⁵ These reports reveal that Africa's population of older persons is growing rapidly. The reasons for an increase in population is attributed to the decrease in the mortality rate of older persons and the decline in the global fertility transition. This means that people are relatively less interested in having children. There is a decrease in the number of children people want to have.⁴⁶ As health care services have improved, the life expectancy of elderly people has increased.⁴⁷

Zambia has also experienced population growth in the number of elderly people. In 1990 the country only had 219,196 people aged 60 years and above. Ten years later, the population was projected to grow to 290,168 and it grew to more than the projected figure.⁴⁸ There were an additional 56, 275 people aged 60 years and above for a total of 346, 443. Furthermore, it is projected that the population of the elderly will increase to 598,687 in 2030, to 1, 045, 247 in 2040, and to 1,452,706 in 2050 respectively.⁴⁹ This also means that on the basis of current trends the projected population in 2030 would be more than 598, 687.

The census of 2010 indicated that the population of Zambia was approximately 13, 045,056 of which 6, 394, 455 were males and 6,652,053 were females.⁵⁰ The total population of older people above 60 years was at 346,443 of which 254,806 (3.2%) were living in the rural places and 91,637 (1.8%) were living in the urban places.⁵¹

⁴⁵United Nations, *World Population Aging 2015*, http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WPA2015_Report.pdf (accessed May 4,2017). See also Natasha Kristana & Prannitha Mahara, *Population Aging in Africa*, in *Aging and Health in Africa: International Perspectives on aging*. New York: Springer, 2013, p.11

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., See also United Nations World Population Prospects 2015 https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/publications/files/key_findings_wpp_2015.pdf(accessed May 4,2017).

⁴⁸ CSO, 2010 *census of population and housing: Preliminary population figures*, February 2011 Available at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/wphc/Zambia/PreliminaryReport.pdf> (Accessed July 15, 2017)

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

2.3 Institutional care for the elderly people in Zambia

Institutional care of the elderly in Zambia is provided through homes for the aged.⁵² There are nine homes for elderly people in Zambia.⁵³ Two are run by the Ministry of Community Development Mother and Child Health under the Social Welfare Department while the others are run by faith-based organizations such as United Church of Zambia, Salvation Army and the Catholic church.⁵⁴

Table 1: Location of old people's homes and organizations running them.⁵⁵

No.	Old people's home	Location(District/Province)	Run By
1	Chibolya	Mufulira(Copperbelt)	Zambian Government
2	Chibote	Luanshya(Copperbelt)	Catholic Church
3	Divine Providence	Lusaka (Lusaka)	Catholic Church
4	Kandiana	Sesheke (Western)	United church of Zambia
5	Lukulwe	Senaga (Western)	Catholic Church
6	Maramba	Livingstone (Southern)	Zambian Government
7	Mitanda	Ndola (Copperbelt)	Salvation Army
8	St. Theresa village	Ndola (Copperbelt)	Ndola Ecumenical Peace Association
9	Nkhulumaziba	Solwezi (North-Western)	Peace Embassy international

There are homes insufficient for the elderly people in Zambia. Zambia has 10 provinces and the

⁵² Kamwengo, *Ageing and Elderly in Zambia: Perspectives and issues*. New Delhi: Sterling Internal, 2001, p.15-20

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Mozes Changala. *Challenges faced by caregivers in old people's homes in Zambia*. National Journal of advanced Research 2. (2016): 1.

table above indicates that only 5 out of 10 provinces have homes for the aged where they can receive institutionalized care. The other 5 provinces which do not have such homes for the aged are Muchinga, Luapula, Eastern, Central, and Northern Province. The data also demonstrates that caring for the elderly is not a priority for the Zambian government.

Besides not having enough homes for the elderly people, the homes that exist do not operate at a desirable level. The caregivers work under difficult conditions. These conditions include low staffing levels, insufficient training opportunities for staff, and a great pressure from the aged within the society to be admitted to old people's homes. The other challenge is the lack of sufficient funding to old people's homes by the government.⁵⁶ With all these challenges, it is clear that the plight of the elderly is not good.

2.4. Challenges of the elderly people.

Elderly people go through a number of challenges in life. The major challenges that will be outlined are poverty, health challenges, loneliness, and low self-esteem.

2.4.1. Poverty.

Defining and understanding poverty is relative to the contexts in which it is prevalent. This means that the way poverty is understood in Europe is different from the way Africans understand it. The United Nations Development Programmes defines poverty from different perspectives and these are the ability to have access to the basic needs of life and access to income above the poverty line.⁵⁷ Poverty has been identified as the number one challenge that elderly people experience. Kamwengo states that Africa's poverty is widespread.⁵⁸ What is more, poverty is more predominant among households headed by older people in comparison with households headed by elderly people.⁵⁹ Dhemba agrees with Kamwengo and adds that poverty

⁵⁶ Changala. *Challenges faced by caregivers in old people's homes in Zambia*, 3

⁵⁷ Jotham, Dhemba, *Overcoming poverty in Old age: Social security provision in Lesotho, South Africa, and Zimbabwe*. International Social Work 56, no 6 (2012)819

⁵⁸ Kamwengo, *Growing old in Zambia: Old and New Perspectives*. New Delhi: Sterling Internal, 2004, p.13

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

has hindered the rights of older persons in Africa from being realized.⁶⁰ The elderly people have a right to good health, shelter and sanitation, but they do not enjoy these if they are experiencing poverty.

Within Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest prevalence of poverty among elderly people.⁶¹ According to the National Policy on Aging in Zambia, 60% of the total Zambian population experiences poverty and 42 percent experiences severe poverty. What this means is that they do not have enough money for essential food necessities.⁶² Elderly people face poverty as they grow old because their ability to earn a sufficient income becomes affected. The pension scheme which the government provides is mainly for those who worked in the formal sector which creates a problem for the majority who never worked in the formal sector.⁶³

According to the Living Conditions and Monitoring Survey report which was conducted in 2004, it was noted that there was a higher percentage of poverty among households which were headed by elderly people above the age of 60 years, namely 60 percent.⁶⁴ In 2006, another survey conducted revealed that, 80 percent of the households headed by elderly people above 60 years were likely to fall below the poverty line.⁶⁵ From the reports, it is clear that there was an increase in poverty in the life of the elderly people by 20%.

Due to their age and health challenges, elderly people are considered less able to contribute to the development of the nation. Because they are considered unfit for work, this has led many of them to experience poverty. As a result, they tend not to have enough finances to afford quality health care.⁶⁶

What is more, elderly people lack social security and social protection, especially those who live in the rural areas of Zambia. The senior citizens are living in environments which are not

⁶⁰ Dhemba, *Overcoming poverty in Old age: Social security provision in Lesotho, South Africa and Zimbabwe*, 817

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Chirwa, Masautsto. *Challenges of the elderly in Zambia. A systematic review studies*. European Scientific Journal 12, no.2 (2016):354

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Chirwa. *Challenges of the elderly in Zambia. A systematic review study*, 356

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

economically friendly to them and this poses a great challenge. The other reason that elderly people experiencing poverty is the decline in traditional social structures due to globalization, urbanization, and modernization.⁶⁷ The extended family structure which was used as way of assisting the elderly people from experiencing poverty is now less in place. Another reason cited by others for the poverty of the elderly is lack of affirmative action by law makers.

2.4.2. Taking care of orphans.

In Africa and world over, when a person reaches 60 years or more, he or she is likely to be a grandparent. According to a UNICEF report, due to HIV aids Sub-Sahara Africa has a majority of grandparents who take care of their grandchildren.⁶⁸ The research which was conducted in seven countries, Nigeria, Tanzania, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Cameroon, Kenya and Mozambique found that care for orphaned children has to a great extent been placed on the grandparents.⁶⁹ The female grandparents usually bear the most responsibility for taking care of the orphans.

Research indicates similar situation in Zambia. Kamwengo states that HIV aids has had negative effects on the elderly, especially elderly women in three ways.⁷⁰ The first is that they are affected as mothers because they have lost adult children who were providing for the family and who are no longer present to do so. Secondly, they are affected because they have been left with the responsibility of taking care of the children. Thirdly, if the orphans are HIV positive, the elderly women bear the responsibility to nurse them and make sure medical needs are met.⁷¹ This becomes a very heavy responsibility, in as much as most elderly people in this period would have already retired. It becomes difficult for them to effectively support themselves financially⁷²

⁶⁷ Dhemba, *Overcoming poverty in Old age: Social security provision in Lesotho, South Africa and Zimbabwe*, 819

⁶⁸ https://www.unicef.org/zambia/5109_8455.html (Accessed June 10, 2017)

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Kamwengo, *Growing old in South Africa*. New Delhi: Sterling Internal, 2004, p.40

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

2.4.3. Loneliness

Loneliness is a common characteristic of old age.⁷³ Philips defines loneliness as ‘undesirable or negative feeling about how individuals perceive their situations in relation particularly to social engagement or interaction with others’.⁷⁴ This definition limits loneliness to social interaction and networks. In other words, feeling lonely insinuates a difference between the social activities individuals would like to have in comparison to what they actually have. Feeling lonely implies that people acknowledge the bad feeling which they experience as a result of not having satisfactory relationships. In this case, loneliness is measured based on the comparing one's present (lack of) relationships with past relationships.⁷⁵ In the same vein, Moberg defines loneliness as; ‘the painful experience that happens as a result of partial or total dissatisfaction with human belonging for contact, for communication and companionship.’⁷⁶ According to Moberg, loneliness is something undesirable because it is a painful experience.⁷⁷ He further writes that people would try to do anything possible to avoid loneliness.⁷⁸ Both Moberg and Philips agree that loneliness has a social aspect.

Jayla agrees that loneliness is a relational concept.⁷⁹ On the other hand, she argues that loneliness should not only be examined from a social perspective. Social isolation is not the only measure of loneliness. She states ‘Social loneliness is related to an absence of a broad social network and isolation from any accepting community while emotional loneliness comes from the absence of a reliable attachment figure and a lack of intimate relations’.⁸⁰ This is interesting

⁷³ Jylha, Marja. *Old Age and Loneliness: Cross-Sectional and Longitudinal Analyses in the Tampere Longitudinal Study on Aging*. Canadian Journal of Aging 23, no. 2 (2004): 157

⁷⁴ Philips et al., *Key concepts in Social Gerontology*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010, p.152

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ David O Moberg., *Aging and spirituality: Spiritual dimensions of aging theory, research, practice and policy*. Birmingham: Haworth Press,2001, p.77.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Marja. *Old Age and Loneliness: Cross-Sectional and Longitudinal Analyses in the Tampere Longitudinal Study on Aging*, 159

⁸⁰ Ibid.

because it means that an individual can be lonely even when they have a lot of people around them. For example, an elderly person who has stopped working is likely to experience feelings of loneliness after retirement. The attachment to what he or she has been accustomed to is lost. Another example would be a loss of a loved one.

Research has been conducted among the elderly people who live in homes for the elderly in Zambia. The purpose was to examine the possible predictors of social isolation and aging in Zambia. Sixty respondents, aged 60 years and above, participated and 52% of the respondents reported that they were lonely.⁸¹ The other half reported that they felt hopeless and stressed with regards to life. Interestingly, the majority of those who felt very lonely and hopeless were women. Very few men reported that they were lonely. The reason is that most women above 60 would be widows or would have lost a loved one, while for men, even if they lost a loved one or spouse, they would remarry and have a companion.⁸² What is more, 69% of the elderly people who had never been married also reported that they experienced loneliness. Lack of marriage also seems to play a role in loneliness. This kind of loneliness is in line with Jayla's view that people can still experience loneliness even if they have people surrounding them.⁸³

Mapoma writes, '...loneliness depends on one's age and it increases with age'. Based on his findings, those between 60-69 were not as lonely as those between 70-79. Again, those who were 80 and above were much lonelier in comparison with other groups.⁸⁴ This entails that elderly people experience loneliness when social and emotional relationships become less meaningful in their lives.

2.4.4. *Self-esteem.*

When an individual begins to get old, their abilities and activeness are affected, hence they begin

⁸¹ Mapoma C, Chabila. *Social Isolation and aging in Zambia: Examining the possible predictors*, 6

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Marja. *Old Age and Loneliness: Cross-Sectional and Longitudinal Analyses in the Tampere Longitudinal Study on Aging*, 159

⁸⁴ See Mapoma. *Social Isolation and aging in Zambia: Examining the possible predictors*. *Journal of aging Research* (2012): 6

to feel left out. Elderly people desire to be involved with significant roles in society but when society tries to define their roles differently, a clash becomes unavoidable.⁸⁵ Worldwide, research has shown that people aged 60 years and above who were in formal employment are likely to experience low self-esteem after retirement. The reason for this is that being financially secure as a result of having a stable income, enjoying good health and being in formal employment boosts someone's self-esteem. A lack of these factors serves to drop esteem.⁸⁶

Aging comes with different changes in the general appearance of a person. Many elderly people struggle to accept this. For example, the skin begins to wrinkle as one ages. Some lose sight and the ability to perform day to day functions of life. These and many other developments tend to affect the esteem levels experienced by the elderly. Philips states that self-esteem could also be a result of social exclusion such as exclusion from social relationships and civic engagements.⁸⁷ Mapoma agrees with this assertion and adds lack of education. In his research, he found that the majority of elderly people who were not educated experienced feelings of being useless.⁸⁸ Another factor which contributed to their feelings of uselessness is the fact that younger people no longer come to them for advice. With the coming of technology, younger people seek advice and learn things from social media and the internet. On the other hand, the community's negative perceptions of elderly people contribute to the low self-esteem as well. Harris, writing from a biblical point of view, states that healthy self-esteem of the elderly can only be attained if society sees growing old as a privilege.⁸⁹ This is especially true in a religious setting like a church. The pastor also has important roles to play in contributing to positive levels of self-esteem of the elderly. Harris adds that even preaching that communicates the message that old age is a blessing can help foster self-esteem in elderly persons.⁹⁰ The elderly need to continually be shown

⁸⁵ Harris, *Biblical Perspectives on Aging: God and the elderly*, p.56

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Judith Philips et al., *Key concepts in Social Gerontology*., p.190

⁸⁸ See Mapoma

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Philip S Kavanagh & Hayley E Scruutton, Self Esteem, in: Zeigler-Hill, Virgil, Lisa L.M Welling & Todd K Shackelford, (eds.) *Evolutionary Perspective on Social Psychology*, Charm: Springer, 2015, p. 127.

acceptance in order to increase their self-esteem.⁹¹

2.4.5 Health and Wellbeing

Internationally, health is a fundamental human right for everyone, and the elderly have a right to enjoy health and wellbeing. Medeiros states that the study of aging came as a result of a desire to mitigate and understand the illnesses that come with old age.⁹² Aging presents a very severe health risk in the sense that it becomes a period when many long-lasting illnesses develop. Though scholars such as Alli and Prannitha Maharaj state that good health was formerly viewed as a gift from the gods and poor health as chastisement from the gods, such a concept is difficult to understand because as individuals grow older, they tend to have problems with their health.⁹³

Apt conducted research in Ghana to understand what health and wellbeing means to older people. According to the respondents, health and wellbeing meant the following: ‘Living well, having a good balanced meal, leading a comfortable life, being financially able to take care of oneself and lack of financial worries, having no problems ...’⁹⁴ From the answers from the older adults, it can be suggested that their perception of health and wellbeing was seen mainly from the perspective of social economic freedom. This generally means having a good life and good health means absence of diseases.

Elderly people desire good health but the fact is that as they age, they suffer from various kinds of diseases ranging from communicable to non-communicable, acute and chronic diseases. In general, Africa has the highest rate of chronic diseases in the world compared to any other region. The projection for Africa shows that the region will experience the highest number of death rates among the elderly in the decades to come.⁹⁵ Especially in Africa communicable

⁹¹ Ibid.,

⁹² De Medeiros., *The short Guide to aging and Gerontology*, p.71.

⁹³ Farzana Alli & Prannitha Mahara, The situation of older people in Africa, in *Aging and Health in Africa: International Perspectives on aging*. New York: Springer, 2013, p.53

⁹⁴Nana, Apt, Older people in rural Ghana: Health and health seeking behaviours, in *Aging and Health in Africa: International Perspectives on aging*. New York: Springer, 2013, p.53

⁹⁵ Ibid.

diseases such as HIV Aids and malaria are the major causes of death.⁹⁶ Elderly people also suffer from cerebrovascular diseases and heart disease which are in the top three of the list of diseases which kill people aged 60 years and above. Diabetes is also one of the diseases which has contributed to the highest rate of mortality and morbidity in Africa.

Kamwengo writes that the leading causes of death in Zambia among the elderly people are cardiovascular diseases, heart diseases, malaria, cancer, tuberculosis, pneumonia, asthma and gastro-entitils. Those living in the rural areas run a higher risk of disease.⁹⁷ According to the Global Age Watch report of 2015, Zambia is ranked as the lowest out of 96 nations where the welfare of the elderly people is not good. What is more, the country is ranked lowest even in the access of elderly people to health care.⁹⁸

Besides the prevalence of illness, elderly people also have problems in accessing health care services. A study which was conducted in Kenya and South Africa revealed that the majority of elderly people were not satisfied with the services they received. For instance, in Kenya, elderly people reported negative attitudes among the health workers who needed to attend to them. Similarly, in South Africa, elderly people reported that they spent a lot of time in the queues waiting to be attended to by health personnel.⁹⁹

Most African governments, including that of Zambia, need to improve access to health care services for the elderly people, both in the rural and urban contexts. There should be equity in care and efficiency on the part of trained staff. Above all, the factors affecting the health situation of elderly people such as socioeconomic conditions, gender, marital status, education, and social networks must be put into consideration in policy formulation.¹⁰⁰

5.6 Spiritual Challenges

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Kamwengo, *Growing old in Zambia: Old and New Perspectives*, p.100

⁹⁸ Chirwa. *Challenges of the elderly in Zambia. A systematic review study*, p.358

⁹⁹ Apt., Older people in rural Ghana: Health and health seeking behaviours, in *Aging and Health in Africa: International Perspectives on aging*. New York: Springer, 2013, p.115

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Aging poses some spiritual challenges. One of the challenges which the elderly people are likely to experience is experiencing meaning in life. Friedman writes, “the aging process challenges a person’s sense of who she is, she has been and who she will yet be.”¹⁰¹ This challenges the elderly people to look at their past and begin to redefine who they are because they have lost most of their roles.¹⁰²

Due to a number of challenges elderly people go through in life, many elderly people tend to question the existence of God in their lives. If God was really present, he could not have allowed them to suffer like this in Life. Some of them who have lost their loved ones would even question why God allowed them to lose their children instead of taking their lives. They usually connect their problems and challenges in life to a spiritual dimension. The result is that some tend to feel as if God is punishing them.

In the same vein, Charles Gerkin shares a story of his elder sisters. The two sisters were both frail and were unable to do a number of things by themselves. In his book, *Introduction to Pastoral Care*, he states that one of his sisters was always complaining as to why God did not just allow her to die rather than keep her alive.¹⁰³ He explains that he did not have any solution to their complaints but that the only things he did was to listen to them. He admits that it is not easy to understand what they go through at this stage.¹⁰⁴ The question of theodicy comes into play because the goodness of God is questioned in these situations. The question, ‘where is God when it hurts?’ thus becomes a very major concern for many elderly people. Kimble brings forward that care to such people should also be aimed at assuring them that God is still their companion even as they pass through such moments of life.¹⁰⁵ They need assurance that God is with them even in their difficult situation and He will continue to take care of them.

¹⁰¹ Friedman, *Jewish Visions of Aging*, p. 108

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Gerkin, *Introduction to Pastoral care*, p.221.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ Kimble, Melvin A, & S.H. Mcfadden, (eds), *Aging Spirituality and Religion: a handbook* Minneapolis: fortress press, 1995, p. 213

Ambler (as quoted by Lartey) suggests three ways which can be used to support those who question the existence of God when faced with challenges. He states; ‘God is beyond’, ‘God is here’ and ‘God is ahead’.¹⁰⁶ This means that no matter what challenges one could be going through, they can still look up to a God who can be trusted as a God who was there, is here today and will be there in eternity. This means that whatever we go through in life, God is present.

2.5 Conclusion.

In this chapter, aging has been defined and understood from different perspectives. Chronological aging has been adopted by the researcher as the working criterion for understanding aging in the context of this paper.

It is an indisputable fact that the world is experiencing population aging. As part of the global village, Zambia has also experienced population aging. This also means that the challenges the elderly people face such as poverty, taking care of the orphans, loneliness, low self-esteem and health and wellbeing are on the increase, based on the data which has been presented. It is important for governments to prioritise care for the elderly in their policy formulation and government plans. Access to health and care must be made accessible to all. On the other hand, some of the challenges the elderly people go through could be the responsibility of the communities and of the church.

The four perspectives on aging, which are the biological, sociological, psychological and chronological, will again play a role in chapter four when discussing the biblical and pastoral perspectives on aging.

¹⁰⁶ Emmanuel Y Lartey, *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural world*. Atlanta:Wipf and Stock Publishers 2006, p. 101

Chapter 3. Social and cultural perceptions of the elderly people.

In this chapter, I will discuss the perceptions people have towards the elderly people. I will look at three common perceptions: elderly people as enemies of progress, elderly people as an economic burden and elderly people as witches. I will discuss the perception of elderly people as witches to some extent, because it is one of the major reasons that most of the elderly people in Zambia are treated in a negative manner.

3.1 Elderly people as enemies of progress

Problems between the younger generation and the older generation are not uncommon. Clashes arise, for example, where the younger people are more liberal as compared to the elderly people who are more conservative.¹⁰⁷ Younger people often see senior citizens as being old fashioned. As they belong to the old school, their contribution to society may be limited or not appreciated at all. Elderly people are seen as always wanting things to go their way and not wanting any changes at all. They do not easily accept or appreciate change.¹⁰⁸ This is an interesting circle because the elderly people were younger people at some point and the younger ones will become old at some point.¹⁰⁹ James Ellor, as quoted by Friedman, makes an observation to this effect on tensions within contemporary Christian congregation; “Traditional approaches to the revitalization of the congregation systems treat ‘old’ as an enemy. Old buildings, old worship, old, styles, old clergy and at times the old members are treated as if they are the source of problems for the church.”¹¹⁰ He further observes that the elderly tend to be devalued when such tendencies of valorizing the younger ones are perpetuated.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ *Why are older people more conservative?* Available at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/mr.../why-are-older-people-more-conservative> (accessed on June 2017)

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Friedman, p. 190.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

In his book, *Biblical perspectives on aging*, Harris considers elderly people to be characterized by ‘intransigent conservatism and skepticism’.¹¹² He means that elderly people always want things to be the way they were in the past. He draws an example from the Bible. He talks of how the elderly people wept when the foundations of the temple were being laid after the exile. Surprisingly, when everyone was celebrating, the elderly people were wailing. The reason they lamented is that they remembered what the temple of Solomon looked like, which was unlike the present reality. The majority of them glorified the past, thereby degrading the current situation.¹¹³ This is typical of the aged.

This seems to be true in the churches in Zambia as well. The elderly people tend to feel that younger people are destroying the church by bringing in new ideas. On the other side, younger people feel they are being prevented from making progress because they are forced to maintain the old way of doing things. This observation can be observed among the clergy themselves. Younger pastors feel the church is not moving forward because old pastors do not incorporate new ideas and, reversely, old pastors feel the younger pastors are destroying the church and its heritage with their new ideas. With this kind of attitude among the elderly people, they may not be easily given space to lead in the church if they are in the minority.¹¹⁴ On the other hand, if the younger people are in a minority, elderly people may not easily allow space for younger persons to assume leadership in the church.

Is being conservative wrong and being liberal, right? Should elderly people be treated wrongly because they are conservatives? Well, there is no right or wrong but it is very important to well understand the elderly people. Studies show that elderly people have certain characteristics which tend to make them conservative. They have the ability to judge things rightly, which can be seen in their strong rules and principles and in their ability not to be easily shaken.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Harris, *Biblical Perspectives on Aging: God and the Elderly*, p.86

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 87

¹¹⁴ Rev Phiri, *Phone interview* May, 2017.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

3.2. Elderly people as an economic burden

Globally, people have different perceptions towards old age. Writing from a Chinese context, Lai says that elderly people in China feel they have become a burden to society and to family because they are not able to provide for themselves economically.¹¹⁶ He also adds that these perceptions that elderly people have about themselves are directly connected to how society perceives them. Society views them as an economic burden.¹¹⁷ According to his research, when younger people were interviewed, they also shared the similar view that elderly people were a burden to the family.¹¹⁸ Elderly people in China share a similar to that of Africans.

Many elderly people in Africa rely on their children and families for social and economic support. Kamwengo states that children are expected to act as social security for their parents in times of difficulties.¹¹⁹ However, the challenge comes in when the children are also struggling to make both ends meet.¹²⁰ There are moments that some children will not even have enough to take care of themselves so that it becomes a challenge to provide for their parents as well. Some elderly people have been abandoned on the accusation of practicing witchcraft or being a financial burden to the children.¹²¹ In cases where the old people are sick, some family members end up abandoning their parents in hospitals, because they do have the means to take good care of them.¹²²

Gerkins, writing from a western perspectives states that the challenge for older children to take care of their parents lies in the fact that they also have children who need their support.¹²³ It

¹¹⁶ Daniel W.L Lai, *Ageism, and depression: Perceptions of older people as a Burden in China*. Journal of social issues 72 no. 1 (2016) 26

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ See Martin Kamwengo

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ <https://globalpressjournal.com/africa/zambia/zambian-elderly-abandoned-forced-flee-faced-allegations-witchcraft/> (Accessed on June 10, 2017)

¹²² Isabella Adoderin, *Intergenerational support and old age in Africa*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2006, p.83

¹²³ Gerkin, *Introduction to pastoral Theology*, p.215

becomes a challenge to provide care for both their children and their parents. The other reason cited is that elderly people sometimes tends to demand more than the children have the capacity to do.¹²⁴

Research conducted by Aboderin in Ghana on providing support for aged parents, showed that the high cost of living acted as a hindering factor.¹²⁵ According to the respondents, the cost of living in the past was cheap, unlike in the present time. The elderly either lived on the streets begging from well-wishers or in old people's homes. Sometimes, children used these accusations to act as an excuse from providing for their parents.

Even in the church, elderly people are not considered much of an asset but a liability because they do not contribute much to the church in terms of financial contribution.¹²⁶ According to the Reformed Church in Zambia constitution, the church's finances are generally generated from two main sources which are tithes and offerings. The tithes and offerings sustain most of the financial obligations of the church. Elderly people in the church may not contribute much in terms of financial and material resources because they may not have any formal employment due to retirement. As a result, their participation in the church is affected because they are less likely to be included in church programs which require financial contributions. They are considered to be in need of financial assistance and material assistance. And the majority of the church programs are designed mainly for the able-bodied people.

3.3. Accusations of practicing witchcraft

3.3.1 In African worldview.

Witchcraft and belief in mystical powers are widespread in Africa. Every African raised up in a typical African setting has either experienced acts of witchcraft or has heard of the stories related to witchcraft.¹²⁷ Hence for Africans, witchcraft is not something that can be dismissed just as mere superstition, because it is something that is perceived to exist and thrive in their midst.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ See Adoderin, *Intergenerational support and old age in Africa*, p.80

¹²⁶ Rev Alick Banda *Phone Interview* May 2017

¹²⁷ Mbiti S, J, *African Religions and Philosophy*. Gaborone: Heinemann Education Publishers 1999, p.189

Witchcraft, Umfwiti in Chewa and Ubuloshi in Bemba is attributed to a person who has more powers than an average person. Moreover, in most cases the witches are believed to be women. They turn into spirits to torment and trouble other people in the night.¹²⁸ The whole purpose of witchcraft is to destroy human life. It is an enemy of virtues like, love, peace and solidarity.¹²⁹ Witchcraft is also considered to be the major cause of problems such as famine, deaths, wars, diseases and poverty.¹³⁰ All these misfortunes are taken to be caused by a sorcerer or a witch. An example is given of a woman whose daughter died due to malaria caused by a female mosquito. According to her, there is no way her daughter could have died because of being infected with malaria. If it is the mosquito which caused malaria, then somebody could have sent that mosquito to attack her daughter.¹³¹ The explanation that malaria was caused by a mosquito could not suffice, because it does not explain how the mosquito picked on her daughter out of the many people around.¹³² Nothing is taken to happen by chance.

In Africa, any negative experience in the community is connected to witchcraft or some mystical powers at play.¹³³ Kagema writes that when they brought the gospel missionaries did not help Africans much in understanding the causes of the problems they were going through. According to him, missionaries were quick to preach Christianity to the Africans without fully helping them to understand the major causes of the problems from a Christian point of view.¹³⁴ Mbiti concurs with Kagema's view and accuses the European and western writers of giving a distorted view of witchcraft and mystical powers in Africa. According to him, witchcraft is not superstition.¹³⁵

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 196

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Kagema K, Dickson. *The impact of magic and witchcraft in the social, economic, political and spiritual life of African communities*. International Journal of Humanities, social sciences and education 1, no.5 (2014): 9

¹³¹ Mbiti

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ See Mbiti, p.189

How is witchcraft connected to aging or old age? In the traditional African setting, elderly people played a very big role in African spirituality both during the pre-colonial and post-colonial periods.¹³⁶ They had the role of consulting the gods if there was a problem in the society. People visited them whenever there was a problem or an illness.¹³⁷ They were considered to have powers to communicate with the invisible and offer solutions. It is such roles that made it easy for people to connect them to practicing witchcraft. The younger generation sees such tendencies in the elderly people as a sign of being connected to evil.¹³⁸

In his book, *African religions and philosophy*, John Mbiti narrates an incident from his childhood days: "...when I was a schoolboy a locust invasion came to my home area. An elderly man who was a neighbor of ours, burnt a medicine in his field to keep away the locusts. Within a few hours, the locusts had eaten up virtually everything green including crops, trees, and then flown off in their large swarms. Everyone was grieved and horrified by the great tragedy. Word went around our community, however, that the locusts had not touched any crops in the field of our neighbor who used the medicine..."¹³⁹ According to Mbiti, all the people were astonished that nothing happened to the field of this old man, including Mbiti himself. He further states that he visited the field by himself to verify what people were saying and he discovered it was true. The people questioned the type of medicine which he used because it is not something which was common. This narration is an example of how people can easily link elderly people to practicing witchcraft. The fact that people were surprised at how the man's field was not affected by the swarm of locusts was to them a clear suggestion that there could be some mystical powers at play in the life of the elderly man

Many African countries such as Uganda, Zimbabwe, Zambia, South Africa, Ghana, Tanzania, and Nigeria have recorded cases of elderly people being killed or chased from their communities due to accusations of practicing witchcraft. Whether the accusations are true or false might be a very difficult task to substantiate. In South Africa, there are reports of hundreds of people

¹³⁶ Martin Kamwengo, *Growing old in Zambia*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ See Mbiti, p.189

having been killed on accusations of witchcraft between 1994 and 1996. The majority of those killed were elderly people.¹⁴⁰ In Tanzania, the situation is similar. Tanzania has the highest number of elderly people who have been killed due to accusations of witchcraft in Africa. According to Machangu, between 1970 and 1980, 3,693 people were killed due to allegations of practicing witchcraft.¹⁴¹ What is more, she adds that the figure rose to more than 23,000 deaths of people who were killed on accusations of practicing witchcraft a decade later. Again, statistics show that the majority were elderly women.¹⁴² From 1990 to 2001, a total of 17,220 elderly women were accused of practicing witchcraft of which 1,722 women were killed.¹⁴³ This represents 10% of the total number of women who were accused. This demonstrates the vulnerability of women. The risk factors for such accusations and abuse are mainly related to poverty and the low status of women in the cultural setting.¹⁴⁴ From this data, it is evident that the elderly people in Africa are very vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft.

In Kinshasa, elderly people are also thought to have mystical powers and are suspected of being witches.¹⁴⁵ The elderly people are suspected of practicing witchcraft due to jealousy, anger, hatred and the desire to destroy opponents. Hoffman writes that the accusations of witchcraft are expressions of social rejection. He states that the notion that the elderly people are witches is strongly embedded in the mindset of the young and the old themselves. What is more, even elderly people who are kept in old people homes are viewed as witches and visiting them is seen as a risk to one's life because it is like visiting a group of witches all in one place. Surprisingly, the retirement homes are seen as a den of witches even by some elderly people themselves. Hoffman narrates a situation where an elderly person prevented her children from taking her to a

¹⁴⁰ Kagema K, Dickson. *The impact of magic and witchcraft in the social, economic, political and spiritual life of African communities*. International Journal of Humanities and social sciences and education international 1, no.5 (2014): 9

¹⁴¹Machangu M, Hamisi. *The vulnerability of elderly women to witchcraft accusations among the Fipa of Sumbawanga, 1961-2010*. Journal of International women's studies 16, no.2 (2015):275

¹⁴² Ibid

¹⁴³ Help Age International, *Rights for older people in Tanzania* available at <http://www.helpage.org/what-we-do/rights/womens-rights-in-tanzania/> (Accessed June 5, 2017)

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Hoffman J & Katrine P (ed.), *Ageing in Sub-Saharan Africa: Spaces and Practices*. Bristol: Policy Press, 2016, p. 46

retirement home because she did not want to become a witch.¹⁴⁶ It is surprising that the elderly themselves would have such perceptions of those living in the retirement homes.

3.3.2. *In Zambia*

As part of the African continent, Zambia has not been spared of such accusations against senior citizens. Growing old in many parts of Zambia is not an easy thing. In many Zambian societies, elderly people are commonly considered witches. What is more, they have been viewed as evil people and have been considered responsible for the deaths of people in the community. Such allegations have led to them being killed or neglected by family members. In Maomao's research on the elderly in Zambia, he states that aged people go through humiliation in life due to accusations of practicing witchcraft by members of the society. What is more, due to such perceptions, even family members are afraid of taking care of such people for fear of being linked to witchcraft as well. Such unfounded allegations have led to a number of elderly people being abandoned by their families and people who could support them. These people end up living their lives on the streets, begging from well-wishers for their survival. In this way, they experience social stigma.

On the other hand, elderly people may be viewed as witches based on how they have lived their lives in the past. Kamwengo gives an account of a parent who after receiving his retirement package, left and abandoned his own children and wife and married another woman. Some of the man's children could not finish school because they had no one to pay for them. The man depleted his money and was later chased off by the new wife. Having nowhere to go, he decided to return to his own children and former wife. Unfortunately, the man could not be welcomed back and hence ended up living on the streets.¹⁴⁷ Some elderly people in such situations may not be viewed as witches because they actually practiced witchcraft, but because they did not show a good example as a parent who could show support and love to his children. Because such parents did not provide for the family in their productive years, they are likely to be viewed as evil.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid

One of the elderly women living at Divine Providence Home¹⁴⁸ in Lusaka old people's homes narrates, "When I lost seven of my children, my son accused me of having bewitched them and he had to abandon me. I was abandoned without support and care from my family but I also feared telling other people because I feared to be abused more".¹⁴⁹ This story just illustrates how many elderly people in the Zambian context pass through humiliating experiences in life.

According to the Lusaka Times, an online publication, the Zambian vice president condemned the accusations of witchcraft against elderly people as a disgrace to the Zambian society. She stated that elderly people should not be accused of practicing witchcraft but must be shown love and care¹⁵⁰. Some of the elderly people who live in old people's homes are there because their family members abandoned them and accused them of practicing witchcraft.¹⁵¹

3.3.3. *The Church.*

Interestingly, the image of elderly people as witches is also common in the church. I remember when I was about to go into ministry as a young man, some of my family members who were already members of the church cautioned me about joining the church. They stated that I was too young to join a church where the majority of the members were elderly people. They told me that I was joining the church at my own risk because I wanted to die early. It is not surprising that even some members of the church have such perceptions of the elderly people within the church. In the church in which I am currently serving as a minister, 40 % of the members are elderly people. Surprisingly, the people who live in the local area where the church is located have for a long time viewed the church as a church for witches, because of the presence of the elderly people. In their local language Bemba, they would call it 'Chechi iyatukote utuloshi', meaning

¹⁴⁸ This is one of the homes for the elderly people in Zambia. It is based in Lusaka the capital of Zambia.

¹⁴⁹<https://globalpressjournal.com/africa/zambia/zambian-elderly-abandoned-forced-flee-faced-allegations-witchcraft/> (Accessed on June 10, 2017)

¹⁵⁰<https://www.lusakatimes.com/2015/06/24/neglecting-the-elderly-in-society-and-regarding-them-as-witches-is-a-disgrace-inonge-wina> (Accessed March 5, 2017)

¹⁵¹ Global Press Journal Zambia, *Zambian elderly abandoned, forced to flee when faced with accusations of witchcraft* available at <https://globalpressjournal.com/africa/zambia/zambian-elderly-abandoned-forced-flee-faced-allegations-witchcraft/> (Accessed on June 10, 2017)

that it is the church for elderly people who are witches. This was so surprising to me because even some members of the community felt when they first had contacts with me that I was too young to lead a church with a majority of elderly people.

One of the respondents, Rev, Alick Banda holds the view that people's perceptions of the elderly people as being witches are also common in the church. He observes that these perceptions are more prevalent among the younger people. He argues that this is so because the youths feel that elderly people in the church still believe more in traditional means of healing than in prayer. The younger people see the elderly as less spiritual.¹⁵² On the other hand, Rev. Sekeleti provides a similar view that the elderly people, because of their age, may not participate in the charismatic singing of praise and worship in the church with as a result that other people, especially the youth end up viewing them as witches.¹⁵³ Rev. Tembo who has worked among elderly people for over 6 years narrates, "...the perceptions of elderly people as being witches are there in the church. I had an experience where some church leaders had to resign from their leadership positions because they were afraid of being bewitched. They accused the elderly people of threatening them if they took up those leadership positions..."¹⁵⁴ This is also a common experience in most churches where elderly people always want to be in charge because they have been around for a long time. However, it is very difficult to substantiate such viewpoints because witchcraft in itself is a complex thing.

3.4. Conclusion.

The socio and cultural perceptions discussed in this chapter such as accusations of practicing witchcraft, elderly people being an economic burden to society and family and senility are the predominant views people have of them. These perceptions have increased the likelihood of the elderly losing their place in society. The perceptions also make it difficult for elderly people to appreciate life. These stereotypes make individuals feel less important and of less value to

¹⁵² Rev Alick Banda, *Phone interview*

¹⁵³ Rev Sekeleti, *Phone interview*

¹⁵⁴ Rev Tembo, *Phone interview*

society. Because members of the church belong to the larger community of the society, they also share similar perceptions concerning the elderly people. Therefore, it is not surprising that such perceptions also exist in the church. The question becomes how the church can respond to such perceptions.

In my next chapter, I will focus on biblical understandings of aging and how some of these negative perceptions can be encountered in light of how God views aging and old age. This is important because it will highlight vantage points which the church can adopt and employ in order to arrive at a sound understanding of the ministry to the elderly people.

Chapter 4. Biblical perspectives on aging and models needed for pastoral care to the elderly in the RCZ

This chapter discusses Old and New Testament perspectives on aging. The implications of the biblical understandings of aging for church and society are treated as well. Furthermore, models of De Lange and Friedman are investigated to help establish what kind of an approach would be helpful for elderly people. Each of the models is evaluated and a conclusion is given.

4.1. Old Testament

First of all, it is interesting to note that the Bible shares stories of some people who lived long lives. Examples of these people are found in the book of Genesis and include Methuselah (969 years), Adam and Eve (930 years), Cain and Abel (112 years) and the list goes on.¹⁵⁵ According to the chronological hierarchy of those who lived for long years, Methuselah lived the longest number of years while Joseph lived the least number of years.¹⁵⁶ The patriarchs lived a great number of years. Despite the long life of the patriarchs, however, Harris and Friedman propose that the chronological age in the Bible would generally be above sixty or seventy years.¹⁵⁷ On the contrary, some scholars suggest that fifty years could be average in as much as life expectancy in biblical times was between forty and fifty.¹⁵⁸ This entails that anyone sixty years or above would be considered elderly.

Aging has its own challenges and hurtful experiences. A sign of aging is having gray hair. It is a period of physical and mental deficiencies. Psalm 71:9 stresses some of the challenges expressed by David, “Cast me not off in the time of my old age; when my strength fails, forsake me not.”¹⁵⁹ Another scripture that depicts old age as a challenging time in life is Ecclesiastes 12:1, attributed to Solomon, ‘Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of

¹⁵⁵ Tailor L, Elias., Senior Years: Old and New Testament International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences 1 no.18 : 104 <http://www.ijhssnet.com/> (Accessed on 10th June 2017)

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Harris, *Biblical Perspectives on Aging: God and the Elderly*. 2008, p.

¹⁵⁸ David Ritsema, *The spiritual formation of the elderly in the New Testament world*, Journal of Religion, Spirituality and Aging, 21 no 1 (2008):40 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15528030802265304> (Accessed on 10th June 2017)

¹⁵⁹ Friedman, Dayle A., *Jewish visions for aging: A professional guide for fostering wholeness: Jewish Visions for Aging*. Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008, p.4

trouble come and the years approach when you will say I find no pleasure in them.’’¹⁶⁰ This scripture suggests that old age is an experience in life which one may prefer not to endure. It is a period when one loses strength in one’s bodies. For example, Isaac lost his sight in old age, while David was constantly worried about his feeble body.¹⁶¹ Other examples include Moses who lost his physical strength in old age, was unable to fulfil certain responsibilities and ended up requesting God to take his life.¹⁶² Abraham was surprised that he would have a child in his old age because his wife had already passed the age for conceiving. When Barzillai was invited by David to celebrate the death of Absalom, Barzillai turned down the gesture.¹⁶³ He could not accompany David to Jerusalem to celebrate because he felt he was too old to participate in the event. He had to decline the invitation because he did not have enough strength. He sent his son Chimnam to replace him (2 Samuel 19:31-41).¹⁶⁴

Despite old age having its own challenges, God still is pictured to place value on the elderly. The elderly also occupied a very special place in the eyes of God. In Israel, elderly people were to be highly respected and valued. Respect for the elderly was an attitude which was encouraged for everyone. Faith in God was seen through how the elderly people were respected.¹⁶⁵ Older people had authority and children of all ages were commanded to show respect to them. In Israel, the ‘Book of Covenant’, ‘Decalogue’ and the ‘Holiness Code’ are some of the documents which outlined rules for treating parents. The laws also contained consequences for not adhering to them and were intended to prevent elderly people from being abused in any way

4.1.1 The Torah

According to the “Book of the Covenant” or “Covenant Code” (Exod. 20: 22-23), any person who abused elderly people, especially the children, would receive harsh punishment. Any breach

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p.5

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid, p.8

¹⁶³ Evert Jonker, ‘Towards a practical theological perspective on successful ageing’ in: Bouwer, J (ed.) *Successful ageing, spirituality and meaning: Multidisciplinary perspectives*, Leuven: Peeters, 2010, p.214.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

of the law brought serious consequences upon the children. Death was the capital punishment that children who disobeyed and devalued their parents were to receive.¹⁶⁶ These laws did not allow room for one to devalue the place of a parent. Those who neglected their parents were considered to be cursed.¹⁶⁷ The law stated: “the one who strikes mother or father shall be put to death” Exodus 21:15, 17).¹⁶⁸ The one who curses the mother shall be put to death.” Similar views are echoed in the Decalogue (Ten Commandments). Children were expected to honor their parents because God commanded them to do so and not man.¹⁶⁹

Another set of rules which was used in Israel was the Dodecalog (set of twelve curses). It contained curses which met those who did not fulfil their filial obligations. The congregation had embraced these laws and everyone was expected to follow them. In the Covenant Code, any child who did not take responsibility for his or her parents was to be cursed.¹⁷⁰ Those who failed to fulfil their filial responsibilities would be brought before the congregation and the leader of the congregation would pronounce the curses upon the person. The role of the congregants was to confirm the curses by saying ‘Amen’¹⁷¹

In the Ten Commandments, the fifth commandment states that children are to honor their mother and father: "Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Eternal, your God, is giving you" (Exod. 20:12).¹⁷² Interestingly, this commandment comes with rewards for obeying it. Those who will obey are promised long life. This suggests that care for parents meant long life on the part of those who followed the law.¹⁷³

A similar law in Israel is found in the Holiness Code found in Leviticus (Lev.17:18-26). According to the code, children were expected to honor their parents: ‘You shall raise up before

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p.72.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Harris, p. 72

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p.104

¹⁷² Friedman, p.86

¹⁷³ Ibid.

the greyhead and honor the face of an old person and you shall fear your God; I am the Lord' (Lev. 19:32).¹⁷⁴ Any child who did not honor his or her parent was to be condemned and sentenced to death. The child would be brought before the elders of the community and be stoned to death by the members of the community. The laws demanded that parents or rather elderly people not be taken lightly by their children. The community was to participate in ensuring that the laws were adhered to.¹⁷⁵ The younger people were expected to show respect to their parents as a sign of showing faith and respect to God. Such laws worked to prevent the elderly people from being abused in any sense. Furthermore, these laws acted as social protection measures for the elderly.

4.1.2 Book of Kings

A story that illustrates the demand of respect towards the elderly is given in the book of 2 Kings 2:23-25; 'From there Elisha went up to Bethel, as he was walking along the road, some boys came out of the town and jeered at him, "Get out of here, baldy!" they said ... He turned around and looked at them and pronounced a curse upon them in the name of the Lord. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the boys...' ¹⁷⁶ Despite Elisha having lost his hair in his old age, he deserved respect. The young boys were cursed by Elisha because they did not show respect and honor to him. The curse carried authority because it was uttered by the prophet in the name of the Lord. Respect for elderly people is what God requires from young people.

4.1.3 Wisdom literature and the elderly

In the wisdom literature, there is a relation between aging and respect. The book of Proverbs provides a very clear insight into how the elderly are to be treated in society. Elderly people are seen to play a major role in teaching and maintaining peace and order in the community.¹⁷⁷ There are two points worth noting about how the elderly are depicted in wisdom literature. They

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, p.77

are considered teachers and they are products of wise living.

Why are the elderly considered teachers? They are teachers because they have learned a great deal in life based on their experiences and knowledge.¹⁷⁸ They have a vast knowledge of life. Younger people are expected to be humble and learn from the elderly. The young are expected to value and respect the insights the elderly people have to offer. The ability to listen and respect the views of the elderly assures young people success. What is more, younger people who take heed to the wise teachings of the elderly are given assurance of surviving difficult times.¹⁷⁹ The proverbs are structured in a manner that a father transfers wisdom to his son and the son is expected to listen and learn.

Secondly, elderly people are considered products of wise living, because old age is a product of wise living. Getting old comes as a benefit of having been able to live wisely. Elderly people have been able to follow the required rules of life and therefore are able to live for long years. The graying of hair was a sign of having obeyed all the virtues of life.¹⁸⁰ Proverbs 16:31 states that people attain old age through living a virtuous life.¹⁸¹ Elders are to be treated with reverence because old age is a reward and a blessing. Furthermore, valuing the elderly was the sign of appreciating their experiences of life.¹⁸²

4.1.4 The Book of Ruth

Another wonderful example of the role of the elderly is seen in the case of Naomi in the book of Ruth. The story presents some interesting insights about the role of the elderly in the lives of the younger generation.¹⁸³ Being a widow and having lost her husband, Ruth decided to live with her mother in law, Naomi, who was also a widow, and to help her with some responsibilities. Ruth later became successful and found favour in the eyes of Boaz, who then married her, all

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p.78.

¹⁸⁰ Friedman, *A professional guide for fostering wholeness: Jewish Visions for Aging*, p.7

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid, p.11.

with the help of Naomi. Naomi played an important role in the life of Ruth and Ruth was receptive to the instructions which Naomi gave, which proved successful. The story of Ruth and Naomi thus demonstrates some aspects of intergenerational care. When Ruth conceives, Naomi was ready to show care and support to the child, and the child is also considered Naomi's child (Ruth 4:4).¹⁸⁴

4.1.5 The Book of Malachi.

The Old Testament ends on a very good note. The book of Malachi gives an instruction as to how families will be united. Reconciliation is assured in the book of Malachi: "And He will restore the hearts of the father to their children and the heart of their children to their father, lest I come and smite the land with a case" (Mal. 4:6).¹⁸⁵ The role of Elijah when he returns will be to bring families together. This scripture gives an indication of how families should live. It also explains the cornerstones of God's desire for families. Above all, the scripture promises peace between fathers and children.¹⁸⁶

4.2. New Testament.

The New Testament contains some negative images of 'old' such as the case of the 'old garment' (Mark 2:21) and the story of the prodigal son where the 'older brother' was not happy.¹⁸⁷ Harris notes that in some Pauline writings, the word 'old' was used synonymously with the word 'evil' such as the 'old person' must be crucified in order not to become a slave to sin.¹⁸⁸ At the same time, he argues that the manner in which the word is used in the literature must not be confused with old age or aging.¹⁸⁹ Terms such as 'old nature', 'old ways', 'old yeast' must be understood in their context.. They do not refer to years of age of a person.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Harris, p.117.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Friedman, p.41.

¹⁸⁸ Harris, p.129

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

In the synoptic gospels, ancient traditions sometimes seem to be understood in a negative sense. In Luke 14:26, Jesus states: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father, mother, wife, and children, brothers, sisters and beside them also life, such cannot be my disciple.”¹⁹¹ Another quote is where Jesus says: “Do not think I came to bring peace on Earth? No, I tell you but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother...” (Luke 12:51-53).¹⁹²

On a superficial level, these teachings of Jesus seem to suggest that filial responsibilities should be neglected. But what does Jesus mean in these teachings? In the first place, it is vital to understand that the kingdom of God called for total submission as a disciple. No one was to allow connections to the family to interfere with the work of being a disciple. Loyalty to the family would affect the work of discipleship.¹⁹³ And families possessed a great deal of authority on an individual. Obedience to the family could make it difficult to become a disciple of Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁴ Some families might have persecuted those who decided to follow Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁵

Secondly, Jesus did not justify family neglect in his teachings. Jesus expressed concern for vulnerable people such as widows and showed sympathy to them. He challenged the young rich ruler to sell his property and share his money with the poor and, particularly relevant here, the rich ruler is told to honor his mother and father.¹⁹⁶ Jesus denounced all the injustice which was perpetuated against the marginalised, of which the elderly people were a part.

There are a number of examples in the New Testament concerning the place and the roles of elderly people. In the gospel according to Luke, there is a story of Elizabeth and the priest Zechariah, who were of old age.¹⁹⁷ These elderly people played a significant role in the birth

¹⁹¹ Harris, p.126

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ritsema, *The spiritual formation of the elderly in the New Testament world*, *Journal of Religion*,

stories of Jesus Christ. Two other elderly people in the stories are Simeon and Anna. Simeon accompanied the dedication and circumcision of Jesus at the temple. Anna as an elderly woman witnessed the dedication ceremony and envisioned Jesus as an important person in the life of Israel.¹⁹⁸

In the letters of Paul, elderly people in the early church played significant roles. They worked as church leaders. Paul, who himself was considered to be an older person, appointed most of the elders to lead the churches from various places in Judean Christianity¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, some elderly people served in the Sanhedrin which was the council of leaders in Jerusalem.²⁰⁰

The New Testament therefore does not revert the respect and honor towards the elderly as presented in Old Testament, but reemphasizes the need to respect and appreciate the elderly. The emphasis on honoring parents is echoed in the book of Ephesians 6: 1-3; "Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and your mother which is the first commandment with a blessing that it may go well with you and that you will enjoy long life on earth." This scripture quotes the Mosaic traditions of showing respect toward the parents (Exod.20:12, Deut.5:16, 6:7, 20:1-21; 11:19).²⁰¹ Young leaders such as Timothy were advised by Paul to treat the elderly people with much-desired respect and honor.²⁰²

What does it mean to honor parents? In order to understand honor, Friedman makes a distinction between honor and reverence. According to her, to revere means not to sit or stand in the place of the father. It also means not to controvert the words of the father.²⁰³ On the other hand, to honor in the Jewish tradition means to provide the following for the father: foodstuff, drink, and

Spirituality and Aging, 21 no 1 (2008) p.40 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15528030802265304> (Accessed on 10th June 2017)

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, p.40

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Harris, p.131

²⁰² Ritsema, *The spiritual formation of the elderly in the New Testament world*, *Journal of Religion, Spirituality and Aging*, 21 no 1 (2008) p.43 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15528030802265304> (Accessed on 10th June 2017)

²⁰³ Friedman, 87

garments.²⁰⁴ In a nutshell, to honor means to provide basic necessities for the parents and this included material support. Children are supposed to honor their parents because they are parents. This is the divine mandate which is expected of every child.²⁰⁵

4.3 Pastoral and Ethical models.

4.3.1 Dayle Friedman

Rabbi Dayle A. Friedman comes from a Jewish context. From literature she draw a biblical understanding of the elderly in the Jewish context. She quotes from the Midrash and the rabbinic writings to draw lessons on how the elderly people were treated and are to be treated in the Jewish context.²⁰⁶ Above all, she discusses one of the challenges of older life experiences which is to find meaning. Elderly people struggle with finding the meaning of their lives as they age.

Friedman's desire and passion are that the elderly should be treated with due respect and honor and be offered a place in the community where their participation and contributions can be greatly appreciated. In congregational life, she says that the elderly people can bring many assets to the synagogue such as time, energy and accumulated skill. Her passion and desire to see elderly people be part and parcel of the community must be commended and appreciated. She states that elderly people can be given space to lead some of the programs in the synagogue, but that, these programs should not be those which require a lot of thinking and working. She calls such kind of programs as 'minor duties'.

In the work of wanting to understand and assist elderly people, Friedman discusses the model of PaRDes'. According to her, "PaRDes is one set of Jewish hermeneutics that can teach about unlocking the mysteries in the connections with aging persons". PaRDes has four different levels and these are Fact (Peshat), Emotion (Remez), Meaning (Derash) and Soul (sod).²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, p.10

²⁰⁷ Ibid, p.132

At the first level, inquiries are made into the basic facts such as "who, what, where and when"²⁰⁸ The whole purpose of this level is to find out what is happening in the lives of the elderly people. However, this interaction with the elderly remains on a superficial level. The second level is called 'emotion'. Emotion entails that as one listens to elderly people, there is a need to be mindful of non-verbal expressions.²⁰⁹ Their body expressions can help us understand elderly people. Some elderly people may have communication challenges. Their nonverbal communication may then help to indicate to us what is happening in their lives.²¹⁰

On the third level, extracting the meanings of the elderly people's experiences and narratives becomes an important venture. It is vital for the person listening to the stories of the elderly people to understand what they mean. It is also important to note that elderly people attribute different meanings to their experiences in life. The stories of the elderly must be placed in a larger theological context.²¹¹

Soul (Sod) is the final level and has much to do with a deeper relationship that is created with the elderly people with the view of hearing the voice of God. This level is not easy to understand and explain but Friedman offers some questions which can be helpful in understanding this level;

Do I get the person on an intuitive level?

Do I honor the mystery and his or her journey?

Do I see the image of the Divine in this person?

*Is this an I-Thou encounter?*²¹²

These questions can assist the care provider in understanding elderly people because they seek to allow for the voice of God in the conversation.

²⁰⁸ Ibid,

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid, p.139

Friedman also advocates intergenerational programs which will assist to bridge the gap between the elderly and the young. He states that such programs help bring cultural differences into dialogue. I will discuss intergenerational programs in my practical strategies in the next chapter.

4.3.1.1 Evaluation.

Though she writes with a Jewish context in mind, Friedman's thoughts have profound practicability beyond the Jewish context. The model she presents can be helpful for the Reformed Church in Zambia, though it has some weaknesses. According to Friedman, one of the weaknesses of the model is that pastoral care providers sometimes prematurely think that they have understood the meaning of what is being said to them and therefore draw wrong conclusions. In the same vein, pastoral care providers may think that they may already be familiar with the challenges of the elderly people before ever listening to them. On the one hand, the model offers an opportunity for the elderly and care providers engage in interaction. The opportunity for listening to one another is a good thing. However, it is important to be more patient when engaging with the elderly as this process can be more strenuous. It calls for the presence of the care providers to be available especially for those who are frail elderly people.

4.3.2 Frits De Lange (Love command approach)

Frits de Lange is a theologian and a professor at the Protestant Theological University. He is specialized in ethics and systematic theology. In his book, *Loving Later Life*, he passionately asks how elderly people can be taken care of, especially the frail. According to global demographics, elderly people are increasing in population and this fact creates a need to develop ways of caring for the elderly people because "Old age is here to stay."²¹³ He views aging not only as a blessing from God but also as a challenge, because it comes with certain physiological, psychological and biological challenges. Elderly people may develop certain impairments that can make it difficult for them to enjoy and appreciate life.²¹⁴ De Lange asks what kind of ethics is needed to effectively provide care for the elderly, especially those who are reliant on others to

²¹³ Frits De Lange, *Loving later life: An ethics of aging*, p.29

²¹⁴ Ibid,

receive care. As an answer, he develops an ethics of care for elderly people.²¹⁵ He presents his writings not only from a theological but also from an ethical point of view. Interestingly, his writing provides astute insights for practical pastoral theologians and care providers. He addresses all the four practical tasks of practical theology ('what is going on', 'why is it going on', 'what ought to be going on' and 'what must be done') as presented by Richard Osmer.²¹⁶

In his book, *Loving Later Life*, De Lange looks at the love command as the basis for an ethics of care for the elderly people. This is drawn from the words of Jesus Christ in the instruction to show love to oneself and one's neighbor:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, souls and with all your mind. This is the greatest commandment. You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself”²¹⁷

Thus, scripture provides a very clear indication that God's desire and mandate for the human being is to show love and live in love. Jesus Christ calls everyone to exemplify love. Another presupposition that can be deduced from scripture is that love for God can be seen also in the way we show love to the people closest to us. Love is the hallmark of Christian living.

Interestingly, De Lange further restructures the love command. He now puts it in a threefold perspective; 'love for God', 'love for neighbour' and 'love for oneself'.²¹⁸ Who is my neighbor? The word 'neighbour' in Israel represented someone who belonged to the household or someone who lived in the nearby community.²¹⁹ The laws of Israel included provisions that foreigners and strangers were not to be treated in a bad manner (Leviticus 19:18).²²⁰ Elderly people, in the same sense, are our neighbors. They deserve love and care. The command to love is God's cure for the evils done to elderly people

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Richard Osmer, *Introduction to Practical Theology*,

²¹⁷ Ibid, p.29

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid, p.35

²²⁰ Ibid, p.36

Painter shares a similar position to that of De Lange though he frames it in a different way. According to him, elderly people have to be shown love because they are people created in the image of God. In the book, *Aging, Spirituality and Pastoral care*, Painter similarly writes, “...there is a tendency to regard older people as worthless. This is partly a consequence of the failure to value wisdom and experience...human value and dignity in God’s purpose find expression in understanding the *image of God*...”²²¹ Senior people should be shown love because they are created in the image of God. They may develop physical and mental deficiencies but they do not lose the essence of the image of God.²²² Every person is worthy of dignity. Painter argues that a sound relation with others can only be attained when we understand the significance of being created in the image of God.²²³ Furthermore, Harris states that young people should know that wrinkling of skin and graying of hair does not diminish the image of God in an individual²²⁴

In De Lange’s approach to love as an ethics of care, individuals are called to introspection on what it will mean for them to become old. In a similar manner, De Lange writes: "We should not be afraid of growing old, but should love it and we should not feel repulsed by elderly people but should love them".²²⁵ This approach offers ways which can prevent people from fearing to become old and on the other hand, it calls for people to develop rightful attitudes towards the elderly.

4.3.2.1 Evaluation.

Though written from a European context, the writer provides profound theoretical, practical and ethical theological insights that can be valued beyond European pragmatism in as much as aging

²²¹ John Painter, Outward decay and inward renewal: A Biblical Perspective on Aging and the Image of God in: Elizabeth Mackinlay et al, *Aging, Spirituality and Pastoral care: A multi-National perspective* Birmingham: The Haworth Pastoral Press, 2001, p. 44

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Harris, p.157

²²⁵ Painter, p.81

everywhere has similar characteristics. Although De Lange looks mainly at care for frail elderly people, his approach to care can be applied to all elderly people and can be very helpful for the Reformed Church in Zambia today. I find this model of care useful because it challenges individuals to be introspective on how they wish to be cared for when they grow old. Another value of this approach is that it is theologically sound, since God is the center of love. Love for elderly people is understood as demonstrating love to God who created the elderly people. If young people realize that getting old is normal, it will be important for them to approach the elderly with love because one day they will themselves become old. The question is would they love to be treated in a harsh manner? I do not think so.

4.5. Conclusion.

In the Old Testament, elderly people were by law required to be respected. Young people had filial responsibilities which they were to fulfil. Capital punishments and death sentences were consequences for those who failed to honor their parents. As noted above, e various ways were used in the Old Testament to emphasize the value of the elderly. Though the laws could have been considered a burden on the part of the children to take care of their parents, the laws acted as social security and protection for the elderly people. Honoring parents implied, among other things, providing care for them.

It is also clear in the New Testament that the elderly were to be held in high esteem and honor. The place of elderly people in society was re-emphasised in relation to the Old Testament position. However, the New Testament does not discuss capital punishment for failing to honor the parents. Most of the literature agrees on the need to show love and respect to the elderly. Ultimately, the need to show love for God and our neighbors comes out very strongly.

The two approaches proposed by De Lange and Friedman can be very helpful for the church today. Friedman's perspective is important because it calls for care providers to dig deeper into the life of the elderly people by listening to them following the four levels presented. Love as ethics of care by De Lange is very helpful because love covers a multitude of sin, as the Bible puts it, and is the basis of care. For now, it is important to note that elderly people will need care imbedded in love regardless of which model or formal approach will be used. If these approaches are taught and enacted in the church, the place (respect and honor) of the elderly people may be

restored. The church will eventually become an environment of which the elderly feels they are a part.

5. Chapter: The place of the elderly in the Zambian Christian community.

5.1. Introduction.

In this chapter, I want to discuss pragmatic pastoral approaches to care for the elderly people. The main question of the study was to establish an answer to this question, “What is the place of the elderly people in the Zambian Christian context?” It is clear that the elderly has not been accorded a worthy place in the Christian community. Their participation in the church community has been limited. Therefore, RCZ needs to develop programs which will address the plight of the elderly people. These programs have to be both theological and practical.

However, before I go further by discussing what ought to be done, let me recapitulate on what we have discussed up to this point. We have already established what is going on in the lives of the elderly people. We have seen that the elderly people face a number of challenges such as poverty, loneliness, low self-esteem, spiritual challenges and health challenges. We have also seen why the elderly people have been going through such challenges. The major reasons outlined are the perceptions which people have towards them such as accusations of practicing witch craft, being a financial burden and being viewed as conservatives.

In chapter 4, I discussed the pastoral model for care by Friedman and the ethical model for caring the elderly by De Lange. Love as an ethics of care is grounded in the biblical mandate from God to show love to everyone. I also discussed biblical perspectives on aging and the place of the elderly in both the Old and New Testament. It is clear that elderly people in both the New and Old Testament were to be highly valued and honoured. The biblical perspectives on aging provided grounds on which the normative task can be discussed.

The question is, what are the implications of the theological and biblical understandings for the church today? What do these biblical theological understandings of aging mean for the church and society in light, for example, of the prophetic mandate in Micah 6:8, “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness...”²²⁶ The church must speak against the evils and abuses to which elderly people are subjected, both physically and mentally. As a

²²⁶ Kimble, Melvin A & S.H. Mcfadden, (eds). *Aging Spirituality and Religion: a handbook* Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 1995, p. 221

church, her mandate is to protect the rights of the minority and the weak, and the elderly people are in the minority. The fact that some of the perpetrators of these negative perceptions of the elderly are found in the church, makes it of paramount importance that the church devote attention to pointing out the evils of such acts. The church is in a good position to fight injustices. The church must be inclusive in all its programs.

One of the respondents stated that pastors have a role to play when it comes to addressing the issues of the elderly. According to him, the manner in which the pastor treats elderly people in the church has a bearing on how the church members will treat the elderly.²²⁷ The response suggests that pastors have a major role to play when it comes to developing a positive attitude towards the elderly.²²⁸

Elderly people must be seen as a resource for society and not a liability. They are the custodians of the church heritage and must be shown respect. They have a lot to offer to the younger generation. This assertion consociates with that of Friedman, that the elderly must be seen as ‘spiritual capital’ for the religious community.²²⁹ They may not have enough financial and material resources, but they do have much to contribute to the church in terms of wisdom and knowledge. It is also wrong to regard all elderly people as practicing witchcraft.²³⁰

Churches are also called not only to take care of the spiritual lives of elderly people, but also to provide material support. The elderly people are not only the responsibility of the government; churches and communities can supplement government efforts by assisting those who are vulnerable.

Instead of looking at aging as a time of difficult life experiences, Walton offers another perspective which can be of help for the church and the elderly themselves.²³¹ Walton states that to honour the elderly is to observe the ‘Sabbath’. The image of sabbath offers a number of

²²⁷ Rev. Alick Banda, “Phone interview” May 2017.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Friedman, p. 25

²³⁰ Rev. Lupiah Phiri, *Phone interview June, 2017*.

²³¹ Martin Walton ‘Seniors and Sabbath’, unpublished lecture, Groningen, November 15, 2015

perspectives which might help the elderly develop a positive image of life in later years.²³² Among the many perspectives he suggests, I find two especially interesting. The first point deals with the act of remembrance. He writes, “Remembering is a way of knowing who we are. We remember where we have come from and how we have gotten to where we are... A society that fails to recollect its past, fails to honor its elderly...”²³³ I find this quote helpful. I would rephrase the last part of the quote as, ‘A church that fails to recollect its past, fails to honor the elderly’. It is important to note that some of the elderly people were present during the founding of the churches. Not only that, some even contributed their financial and physical support during the construction of the churches

A second aspect of the Sabbath image is the sharing of blessings. Based on the past experiences of the elders, elderly life becomes a ‘time to bless’.²³⁴ This is not the time to regret past life but a moment to reflect on the blessings of life and transfer those blessings to the next generation. The church can learn the wisdom coming from the elderly as a result of experiences and knowledge of life. It is of utmost importance that the church be willing to learn from the stories of the elderly people.²³⁵ In doing such, the elderly people can feel honored.²³⁶

5.2 Theological Reflections

5.2.1 Aging and the Image of God

All human beings are created in the image of God and are to be treated with honor and respect. God created human beings that they should have good relations with God. Drawing an example from Paul’s writing in 2 Corinthians 2 to 5, Painter, in his paper, *Outward Decay and Inward Renewal: A Biblical Perspective on Ageing and The Image of God*, views being created in the

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

image of God as God's purpose for human life.²³⁷ The fact that all people are created in the image of God is an important premise of caring for each other, especially those who may be weak.²³⁸ Painter quotes Paul and states that as a human body loses its physical strength (Decay), the inner person can be renewed day by day.²³⁹ All ages and sexes are included in the image of God. Harris states that if people realised that elderly people are also created in the image of God, stigmatization on the part of the elderly could be countered.²⁴⁰ He writes, "...As replicas of God, the elderly retain their value as persons whose contributions to all generations should not be ignored..."²⁴¹ This entails that no one must despise the contributions of the elderly because of how they may look.

5.2.2 The Elderly and the 'Body of Christ'.

The 'body of Christ' is an important metaphor in Christian tradition. The elderly are considered to be part of the body of Christ. Just as the human body has many organs which all have roles and functions to play, also senior citizens have a role to play in the church. Because each part is important, there is a malfunction of the body if one part is not functioning to its full capacity.

The church can only function effectively when elderly people, like others, are conferred opportunities and space to make contributions of their own. This means that the elderly must be included in decision-making processes of the running of the church. This assertion consociates with that of Lodge from a sociological point of view that: "...older people must not remain untapped resources in our society, opportunities to create wisdom, mentor, give counsel, volunteer, and facilitate should be the norm, not the exception..."²⁴² This holds for the church as

²³⁷ Painter. 45

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Harris, p. 158

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Lodge et al., *The New age of aging: How society needs to change*, p.230.

well. Elderly people have resources to share with the church, and that can only happen if they are recognized as part of the body of Christ.

5.2.3 Repentance and Forgiveness (Reconciliation)

God's ultimate desire is that people should live at peace at all times. However, there are circumstances which may trigger some negatives feelings which prevent people from living at peace. This is especially true between parents and children. However much we talk about loving the elderly, some elderly people may not have faithfully discharged their duties as parents. As a result, children may come to neglect them and not show them care. Aboderin puts it in this manner... "Children withhold all support from parents whom they feel, wholly neglected to try to set them up with necessary educational or professional foundation..."²⁴³ She further shares an incident where a certain parent was sick and was admitted to the hospital. The children later abandoned their father at the hospital. The bills accrued and the hospital staff decided to call the children so that they could settle the bills. The children refused to pay the bills because their father did not take good care of them when they were growing up.²⁴⁴ This clearly indicates that such kind of acts on the part of the parents can contribute to the elderly people losing their place.

However, from a theological point of view, the need to forgive comes in. And both parties need to *seek* forgiveness. It is true that not everyone has lived to the standard expectation. We have all fallen short of the glory of God. Parents may be guilty of not having been good parents and children may also be guilty of not adequately honoring their parents. All such feelings of guilt and hurt can only be dealt with when people seek the forgiveness of God.

5.3 Practical strategies.

5.3.1 Specialized ministry to the elderly people.

²⁴³ Aboderin, p. 120

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

The need to have a specialized ministry for the elderly cannot be overemphasized. One of the ways the church can assist the elderly in overcoming some of the challenges and burdens they have, is to allow them to participate in various ministry programs.²⁴⁵ One of the respondents stated that old people must be inspired to make a contribution in a way that promotes a life of meaning in them.²⁴⁶ The Reformed Church in Zambia has three main groupings of people. The youths which fall under Youth Fellowship (Junior, Senior and Sunday School), and men and women who fall under the Men's and Women's Fellowship, respectively.²⁴⁷ There is no ministry tailored to the older adults in the church. It is in this vein that a special fellowship for an older adult's ministry should be established in the church.

Just as other fellowships have committees and leaders, the ministry to the elderly people should also have its own leadership that will be represented not only at a congregation level but also at the Presbytery²⁴⁸ and at a national level. Just as there is the women's desk, a youth and men's desk at the synod office, there should be a desk for elderly people as well.²⁴⁹ Some may argue that the elderly people are accommodated in the men's and women's fellowship and that it is not necessary to have a specialized ministry for them. However, a specialized ministry for the elderly can specifically address feelings of loneliness and isolation amongst the elderly. Borrowing the words of Van Loon, "...One of the methods of addressing isolation and loneliness is to create support networks that connect people and nurture relationships..."²⁵⁰ She adds, "...Nurturing spirituality involves creating, sustaining, and restoring relationships within the dimensions of the individual and other people..."²⁵¹ This ministry will create a platform where

²⁴⁵ Rev Limon Daka, *Phone interview*, June, 2017.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Reformed Church in Zambia. *The Constitution, By-Laws and Procedures*, p. 79

²⁴⁸ Presbytery refers to congregations at a regional level. Local congregations in a region form a presbytery and have their own leadership called Presbytery Executive Committee (PEC)

²⁴⁹ Rev Alick Banda,

²⁵⁰ Antonia M. Van Loon, 'The challenges and opportunities of faith community an aging society' in: Elizabeth Mackinlay & James W. Ellor (ed.) *Aging, Spirituality and Pastoral Care: A multi-national perspective*. Birmingham: Haworth Press, 2001, p.167

²⁵¹ Ibid

the stereotypes concerning the elderly people can be challenged by inviting them to share their stories.²⁵² This is a pragmatic way in which specialized ministry to the elderly could be helpful.

5.3.2 *Special Sundays (Elderly peoples' Sunday)*

Interestingly, some churches within the Reformed church in Zambia organize special Sundays in the year dedicated mainly to the elderly people. These churches include the Kamwala Congregation in Lusaka, the Chilenje Congregation in Lusaka, the Kaunda Square Congregation in Lusaka, the Makeni Villa congregation in Lusaka, the Mikomfwa congregation on the copper belt and many more. On these days, elderly people are invited to take over the programs of the church. They conduct the worship service. Depending on the budget of the congregation, some congregations organize special gifts and presents for the elderly people.²⁵³ According to Rev. Isaac²⁵⁴ Banda, he feels celebrating the lives of the elderly people is a biblical mandate and assures blessings to those who abide.²⁵⁵ He adds on to say that elderly people must not be seen as witches but as a blessing for both the church and the society at large.²⁵⁶ He narrates,

“As Kaunda Square Congregation, we organized a special day for the elderly of which the permanent secretary from the Ministry of child development officiated. We had forty-eight elderly people who were invited together with their family members of which the oldest among them was 97 years old and the least was 65 years. The reason we invited families is that at times families do not treat elderly people well. We prepared gifts for them and being a cold season, we gave them winter attire and blankets. The church also prepared a meal which we had with the elderly and their families. Interestingly, the permanent secretary wished that his church would also emulate and conduct such programs.”²⁵⁷

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Rev Isaac Banda, *Phone interview*, June, 2017

²⁵⁴ Rev Isaac Banda is the resident minister of the Kaunda Square Congregation and at the same time, the Actuarist of the Synod.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

One particular thing in the program which I found exciting is that family members of the elderly were invited. This was an important occasion for the family also to learn and understand the importance of celebrating the lives of the elderly even at family level. Families at times exclude the elderly in their family activities.

In a similar manner, Rev. Limon Daka agrees with Rev. Isaac Banda and states that such programs are good in that they fulfill a double role. In the first place, such programs help elderly people feel loved and at the same time, they also help other people in developing positive attitudes towards the elderly and older life.²⁵⁸ Young people are helped to develop a positive image about adult life and may develop confidence about it.²⁵⁹

The resident minister of the Makeni Villa congregation also stated that they have special Sundays for the elderly. In his explanation, he said that before he was transferred to Makeni Villa (Urban), he was at Katawa Congregation in a rural setting in the eastern province of Zambia. He encountered serious challenges in setting up special programs for the elderly because the allegations of elderly people practicing witchcraft seemed more prevalent in the rural as compared to an urban setting. But along the way, he managed to organize special programs to teach the members of the congregation the importance for the church of senior citizens.²⁶⁰

When he came to Lusaka after his transfer from the eastern province, he continued with the same programs at Makani Villa Congregation. The congregation has about thirty-four elderly people of which women are in a majority. The congregation held a special Sunday for the senior citizens. At the event, elderly people were presented with gifts such as a bag of mealie meal (maize meal) and some food stuffs courtesy of the synod office.²⁶¹ Some congregations also give out foodstuffs and blankets. These gifts are meant to express appreciation to the elderly people for who they are. These are very good programs for the elderly people. Congregations who are

²⁵⁸ Rev Limon Daka *Phone Interview* June, 2017.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Rev Benny Mvula, *Phone interview*, July 2017.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

conducting them must be commended because they are helping to foster a positive image elderly life.

However, one of the downsides of these programs is lack of consistency and that they are conducted on the base of the availability of resources. It would be good if all the congregations in RCZ were conducting such programs but there is no clear policy direction from the synod on such programs.²⁶² The program depends entirely on the will of the minister and church leaders at the congregational level. Hence it may become difficult to have such programs for the elderly people if the will to do so still remains in the hands of the local minister and the church leaders.²⁶³

The researcher proposes that a special day for elderly people be recognized in the church by-laws. Since there are special designated days for the youth, men's and women's fellowships, there is need to have the same for the elderly people. This day could fall on the same day when Senior Citizens of Association of Zambia²⁶⁴ joins the rest of the world in commemorating the 'International day of the elderly'²⁶⁵.

5.3.3 Special intergenerational programs.

Most of the services in the Reformed church in Zambia are intergenerational. However, there is need for intergenerational services that differ from the normal churches services. There is a need to organize intergenerational programs which will aim at creating a dialogue between elderly people and younger people in the church and in the community. Such intergenerational programs create dialogue which aims at bridging the cultural gap.²⁶⁶ The dialogue helps the younger

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ 'SCAZ' is a Non -Governmental Organisation in Zambia which looks into the plight of elderly people to live dignified lives. For more see; <http://ageafrica.net/resource-library/senior-citizens-association-of-zambia-scaz/> (Accessed 8th July, 2017)

²⁶⁵ International day for Older persons falls on 1 October and is dedicated to improving the welfare and plight of the older person. For more see <http://www.un.org/en/events/olderpersonsday/index.shtml> (Accessed 8th July, 2017)

²⁶⁶ Lynn W. Huber Aging as Pilgrimage: Spiritual Potentials of late Life in: Melvin A. Kimble & Susan H. McFadden (ed.) *Aging, Spirituality, and Religion: A Handbook*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press,2003 p.

people to understand elderly people and vice versa. Knutson agrees with Huber and writes that, "intergenerational programs bring meaning to aging persons as well as the entire congregation as they promote a positive attitude about aging persons."²⁶⁷ Knutson's seems to suggest a one-sided perspective which does not show how elderly people should also understand other people in the church, especially the young ones. Nevertheless, his perspective seems to consider the elderly as relatively more vulnerable, hence the need for younger people to understand them. Friedman also concurs and affirms, '...becoming aware of the suffering of others and reaching out to help them can actually salve the wounds of the one who suffers. One natural forum for thus contribution is sharing the wisdom of the elders with young people through intergenerational ties.'²⁶⁸ In addition, he states that the relationships which are created during intergenerational programs created among the elderly people and the adolescents have the power to build self-esteem for both parties.²⁶⁹ The programs also counter the stereotyping that exist among younger people.

Gerkin, also emphasizes the need for intergenerational programs. In his approach, he implores the churches to come up with intergenerational programs.²⁷⁰ He asserts that pastoral care to the elderly is not only the work of the pastor alone but that the entire congregation has a role to play. He concludes that these discussions have to be more formal.²⁷¹

5.3.4 Introduce Pastoral Gerontological Studies in University

Borrowing from the words of Ayete-Nyampong, it is important that pastoral gerontological courses be introduced in universities across Africa so that people will be able to understand ministry to the elderly in-depth.²⁷² His proposal seems valuable for the situation of the RCZ.

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²⁶⁷ Lois D Knutson, 'Pastoral care of elders and their families' in: Melvin A. Kimble & Susan H. McFadden (ed.) *Aging, Spirituality, and Religion: A Handbook*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003 p.221

²⁶⁸ Friedman, *A professional guide for fostering wholeness: Jewish Visions for Aging*, p.114

²⁶⁹ Ibid p.176-78

²⁷⁰ Gerkin, *Introduction to pastoral care*, p. 215

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Samuel Ayete Nyampong., Samuel., *A critical comparative study of pastoral care provision for the elderly in Britain and its implications on contextualization in Ghana: An inter cultural study with focus on selected mainline churches*. University of Aberdeen: ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1997, p.219

For ministry to the elderly people in the reformed church to be effective, there is need to have a component of pastoral gerontology in the studies at Justo Mwale University²⁷³ Most of the ministers are trained in pastoral care but there is nothing much taught on elderly people. Hence there is need to have an in-depth training especially on ministry to the elderly people within the church. This in turn will assist in having ministers who are going to understand the elderly better and hence assist them spiritually.

5.4. How does these meet the needs of the elderly?

It is clear that the Bible affirms social support for the elderly. The Bible can be used as a resource to learn how care and support to the elderly could be developed in light of current trends in Zambian society. As a church, drawing upon our teachings from the Bible, we are encouraged to keep looking for ways of helping elderly people in our societies so that they can find older life meaningful.

Based on what has been presented, it is helpful to note the challenges that elderly people face such as issues of self-esteem, loneliness, poverty, taking care of orphaned children, health and well-being. The needs of the elderly such as social needs and spiritual needs can be met when intergenerational programs are implemented. The negative perceptions people have can also be addressed in intergenerational programs. Above all, the desire of the researcher is to see that elderly people are accommodated in the life of the church as they participate through various programs. Having specialized ministry, Special Sundays and intergenerational programs are some of the practical strategies outlined which would assist meeting their needs. These practical strategies will enable the elderly to participate in the church.

In meeting their material needs, the church must continue to encourage her members and the community at large to render help to the elderly. The church must also help mobilize resources to meet the needs of the elderly who may not have anyone to take care of them. Children of the elderly must also be encouraged to take care of their aging parents. It would be wrong for children to neglect their parents

²⁷³ Justo Mwale University is where ministers in the Reformed Church in Zambia are trained from and it is owned by Reformed Church in Zambia.

The main question of the study was to establish the answer to this question, “What is the place of the elderly people in the *Zambian Christian context?*” It is clear that the elderly have not been accorded a worthy place in the Christian community. Their participation in the church community has been limited. However, with the practical strategies proposed, the researcher is optimistic that the place of the elderly will be fully restored.

5.5 Recommendation.

5.5.1 Need for Empirical Research.

There is need for further empirical research to be done which will consider the views of the elderly people themselves. The church has a lot of elderly people but it is not very clear how many there are. It will be important to conduct research and establish how many elderly people we have in the church so that the number of those who may need material support can be established. Such research can enhance our understandings of the elderly and how they can best be incorporated in the life of the church and society.

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