



Christian Support for Family Planning Messages for Christian Communities

The following analysis and messages are intended to help religious leaders advocate for family planning services and information and communicate support among Christians for family planning.

Jesus' words, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly," (John 10:10) show Christians that we are meant to live full and healthy lives, making choices that protect our health and the health of others. When pregnancies are spaced too closely together or occur when a mother is too young or old, the health of the mother and child is threatened. If a family has more children than it can feed and nurture, the family will not have abundant life, but will merely struggle to exist.

The bible also affirms that sexual relations within marriage are a gift from God to experience and express His love. The Song of Solomon is a love poem describing sex as a source of pleasure and shared intimacy between a husband a wife and a vital part of the marital bond. Fortunately Christians have a variety of family planning methods to plan pregnancies for when they are healthy for the mother and baby and to limit the number of children to what the family desires, consistent with their beliefs and values.

Christians Value Health and Life

The World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being—and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Reproductive health therefore implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capacity to have children, and the freedom to plan if and when they will have them. *"So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."* Genesis 1:27. Men and women should have the authority to dream and plan, including the family and children they will have.

Christianity is a complete way of life and therefore addresses life holistically. The family is part of life - the family is the basic unit of any community and therefore the bible gives us instructions addressing the issues of family.

- There is no doubt that family well-being cannot be achieved if the basic needs of each member of the family cannot be met. These basic needs include food, clothing, education, shelter, and medical care, which parents care about deeply.
- In 1 Timothy 5:8 the bible addresses the importance of taking care of family. *"But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."* Parents must plan for their children, strive for healthy timing of pregnancies and work to have the family they can support, consistent with their beliefs and values. Religious leaders can help by giving direction to the congregation on voluntary family planning and healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies.

This can only happen if people are empowered with knowledge and understanding on family planning. In Proverbs 15:14 the bible tells us that the heart of a man that has understanding seeks knowledge but the mouth of a fool

feeds on foolishness. It is therefore revealing that knowledge is power and therefore information on voluntary family planning is very important to share with everyone. The dream of some prominent Christian leaders is “that family planning information and services will become a right of every woman and family.”ⁱ (Dr. Samuel Mwenda, General Secretary, Christian Health Association of Kenya).

Healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies saves lives. A child in a developing nation has a higher chance of dying if he or she has siblings very close in age.ⁱⁱ The lives of an estimated 1.6 million children could be saved each year if births were spaced by three years or more.ⁱⁱⁱ A couple should wait until their child is two years old before trying to conceive another child. This allows the child to breastfeed without premature interruption due to another pregnancy too soon, and enables the mother’s body and strength to recover between births.

Family planning improves child nutrition and reduces stunted growth. Studies show the chance that a child will be born underweight or suffer from stunted growth decreases as the space between births increases.^{iv} God values children and gives them special worth in scripture: “Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.’” Matthew 19:14

Family planning reduces abortions. Approximately 22 million women have unsafe abortions each year,^v putting them at risk of serious injury or death. Family planning prevents unintended pregnancies, the primary reason women seek abortions. Women who use more effective methods have fewer unintended pregnancies. “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?” 1 Corinthians 6:19

Family Planning Enriches Communities

Family planning improves education of women and girls. By avoiding unintended pregnancies, family planning enables girls and women to stay in school, enabling them to increase lifetime earnings and fulfill their potential. “Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life.” Proverbs 4:13

Families and communities thrive as women increase their earnings. Family planning enables more women to participate in the economy and generate income for themselves and their families, contributing to the well-being of the family and their community.

Communities, local economies and nations benefit from family planning. As family planning results in longer and healthier lives of families, economies flourish as their children flourish with better education, nutrition and health care. Families, communities and entire societies experience life more abundantly.

“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” Genesis 1:27. To be made in God’s image is to have dignity, value and agency, and the authority to dream and plan, including planning a family and children.

ⁱ Presentation of Dr. Samuel Mwenda to U.S. Congress, June 10, 2010

ⁱⁱ World Health Organization

ⁱⁱⁱ USAID <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1864/calltoaction.pdf>

^{iv} DHS Program <http://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/AS37/AS37.pdf>

^v World Health Organization. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs388/en/>