The *Family Planning Sermon and Messaging Guide for Faith Communities* was produced by Christian Connections for International Health (CCIH) in collaboration with consultant Reverend Canon Gideon B. Byamugisha and his team of fellow teachers, program specialists and congregational leaders in Islam, Hindu, Baha’i and Sikhism in Uganda. The development team included: Paddy W. Nahabwe, PhD, Brain Trust Consult Ltd - Uganda; Mariam Namata, Uganda Muslim Supreme Council Population and Family Health Programme; and Ruth Ninsiima Mbalinda, Friends of Canon Gideon Foundation Uganda.

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**Family Planning:** We use the term family planning (FP) in this document. However, depending on the faith and cultural context, other terms may be used, such as healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies, birth spacing, child spacing or planning. We understand that teachers will use terms consistent with the values and beliefs of their faith and context.

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Executive Summary

There are many issues that challenge our individual and collective physical, emotional, socio-economic and spiritual health. These challenges can occur at personal, family, local, country, regional and global levels, and often have a greater impact on people in the global south. These issues include the huge “unmet need for family planning”1 that results in mothers and children, fathers and communities suffering the preventable and controllable burden of unplanned pregnancies that occur too early and too often, harming the health of a woman or girl and negatively affecting her family and community.

Faith communities, congregations and religious leaders have significant influence on social and health issues. Integrating family planning information into sermons and other messaging opportunities leverages this influence and is consistent with a holistic approach to health, addressing physical health along with spiritual health. Such integration in turn helps both the faith community members and their leaders to be more conscious about the inter-relatedness of socio-economic inequalities, religion-cultural factors, educational deprivations and practical health service injustice that facilitate, sustain or worsen the unmet family planning (FP) need.

This guide is designed to support faith communities, congregations and leaders desiring to boost FP literacy, competence and vigilance through sermons. The sermon guide addresses how religious texts and sacred traditions can be a source of transformative energy for increased and sustained FP, leadership enhancement in FP equity and justice, and breaking the silence and correcting misinformation around FP. We recommend religious leaders partner with health care professionals and refer people interested in more detailed information to their local health care worker.

Messages can be delivered in a variety of settings, including within worship services; during faith community ceremonies; and at different local community, national or global level events.

Section 1 introduces the guide. This section explains why the guide was developed, and how faith and lay leaders and congregations will benefit from it.

Section 2 on “Faiths as Pillars in Family Planning” outlines the nature and importance of support of a given faith, a congregation and their sacred texts and traditions render to the acceptance, ownership and promotion of FP in a community.

Section 3 on “Key Issues and Key Sermon Messages” discusses the critical issues and sermon message points without attaching them to a particular faith so that they can be read and utilized in a variety of faith settings and contexts.

Christian Connections for International Health (CCIH) acknowledges all the input, investment and encouragement we have received beyond the writing team, and appreciates critiques from faith community leaders and other professionals, communities and congregations. We thank champions in the faith community who have made family planning a central part in your holistic faith mission and ministry. Your commitment to this lifesaving health intervention and requests inspired us to create this guide. For further faith and FP resources, please visit www.ccih.org > Resources.

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1 DHS Program, Demographic and Health Surveys. In this document, the concept of “unmet need for family planning” is defined as the percentage of married women who do not want to become pregnant but are not using contraception. [https://dhsprogram.com/topics/unmet-need.cfm](https://dhsprogram.com/topics/unmet-need.cfm)
Section 1: Introduction

Why People of Faith, their Communities, Congregations and Leaders?

People of faith, their communities, congregations and leaders share common values and virtues of love, grace, compassion, equity, peace, justice and human dignity. They value and want to protect life and health. Faith communities recognize that when pregnancies are wanted and planned, this supports the health of mothers and babies, as well as families’ ability to have sufficient resources to care for their children.

Faith communities and faith leaders play crucial gatekeeping and influencing roles in the success of advancing health in many countries. The influence of faith communities and faith leaders has been an essential component of efforts to address early marriage, combat harmful traditional practices, establish equitable treatment for women and girls, and overcome the stigma around male involvement in sexual, reproductive and family health. It is even more urgent and most important to engage faith leaders and faith communities in:

- Sharing accurate information about FP;
- Changing attitudes and beliefs at family and community levels;
- Building individual-level competencies and societal capabilities for FP; and
- Engaging in theological and ethical discussions, spiritual and pastoral dialogues, prayer, service provision and referral activities.

Definition of a Sermon

The word “sermon” can be used and interpreted differently. In this guide, we use the word in its spiritual and religious context to mean a speech given by a pastor, priest, imam, rabbi or other leader as part of a religious service, function or activity. Most sermons will focus on scriptural passages of a given faith with official religious books or scriptures to deliver theological and moral lessons and spiritual and pastoral teachings, as well as a prophetic voice on a given societal issue or challenge.

Common family health challenges make the role of religious leaders to provide theological and spiritual reflection even more pertinent. These leaders are already part of the communities and families struggling with:

- Early, frequent and/or multiple pregnancies and childbirths;
- Child illness and death;
- Pregnancy-related illness or death;
- Lack of access to appropriate and adequate FP services; and
- Poverty and other health insecurities.

As preachers of love and faith, peace and hope, equity and justice in broad contexts and in FP situations specifically, these leaders need resources to support them in their leadership, mentorship and preaching work. This guide has been produced for that very purpose.
Anticipated Benefits from Using the Guide

It is anticipated that sermons on family planning will bring the following benefits:

**Pausing, Reflecting and Praying**: Whereas the world wants believers and preachers to go from one activity to another, most good sermons teach the value of pausing, reflecting and praying for knowledge, greater understanding and deeper wisdom. Is the subject of FP important to believers and preachers, their families and local communities, and globally? If so, it is imperative that faith leaders take time to step back, pause, reflect and seek God’s direction on how they can meaningfully engage their communities to support health through family planning.

**Inner Conviction**: Sometimes, we (individually or collectively as families and communities) lack belief, power and resolve to act on something important for our health, our deeper peace and our greater fulfillment. Impactful sermons on FP can help both the preacher and the audience to form the inner conviction to act and also to encourage their families and communities to support and advocate for FP conducted in a healthy and safe way.
Section 2: Faiths as Pillars in Family Planning

Christianity

In Christianity, God is at the center of creating sexual partnership (Genesis 1:27c) for company and pleasure (Genesis 2:18, 25) and for procreation (Genesis 1:28). The Christian God is mindful of every human life from the womb. Every life is unique and planned for by God. He cherishes good planning in every human endeavor, including the way we “replenish the earth.” Therefore, families should be formed in a responsible manner.

Modern contraception methods did not exist in Bible times, and therefore, scripture is silent on them. The Bible presents children as a gift from God (Genesis 4:1; Genesis 33:5), a heritage from the Lord (Psalm 127; 3-5), a blessing from God (Luke 1:42), and a crown to the aged (Proverb 17:6). Hence, planning for the birth, longevity and quality of life for children is a great spiritual responsibility and moral duty for parents.

Family planning by contraception and fertility awareness methods is planning one’s sexual and marital life in a way that ensures conception happens when it is in the best interests of the mother, child, and family. It is not the act of using FP that is called into question in the Onan story in the Bible (Genesis 3:8), it is the motivation behind the action that raises the question of morality.

Some couples may feel their service to God and community necessitates careful and prayerful decision making as to when they should conceive a child. Some may be convinced that God has a plan for them that does not involve having children, or having them immediately after marriage. Ultimately, a couple’s motives for choosing not to have children, delaying childbirth, using contraception or having numerous children is between their love for God, their love for neighbors (including the unborn ones) and their love for themselves.

According to the Bible, children are gifts from God and “happy is the man whose quiver is full of them.” (Psalm 127:5) But in all reality, not everyone has the same size quiver (capacity to care for a large family). If couples decide to use FP, they should carefully consider which method will be best for their family’s needs.

In Christianity, FP in general and birth spacing in particular is not wrong as long as we are seeking God’s will in what we do. The principle of James 4:15-17 is certainly applicable here: “You ought to say

In Christianity, FP in general and birth spacing in particular is not wrong as long as we are seeking God’s will in what we do.

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2 All verses referring to books of the Bible can be found at https://www.biblegateway.com/
instead, ‘If the Lord is willing, then we will live and do this or that.’ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows what is good to do and does not do it is guilty of sin.”

In Genesis 1:28, God said to the man and woman, “Be fruitful and multiply.” Some people interpret this to mean that intentionally preventing pregnancy would be wrong. But in its original context, this verse was part of a passage telling how God has given humankind stewardship over the world, and it was not a statement about contraception. “And God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’” (Genesis 1:28)

The Christian Bible and traditions give guidance on many topics of spirituality and morality but not specifically on contraception and birth spacing. What they give instead is a broad framework for understanding FP by describing the origin and sanctity of human life.

As said above, God created humankind (male and female) uniquely in His own image. He further dignified human life through the incarnation of Jesus Christ as a man and promised the resurrection of the physical body at the end of time. Thus, all human life should be treated as a gift from God and worthy of respect.

The preciousness of an unborn human life is celebrated in Psalm 139, where David writes, “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb... I am fearfully and wonderfully made... your eyes beheld my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.” (Psalm 139: 13-14, 16) Even in utero at the earliest stages of development, God recognizes the humanity of the embryo (see Genesis 20:18, 29:31, 30:2, 30:22; Judges 13:2-3; Ruth 4:13; 1 Samuel 1:6; Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1: 13-15 and 1:24-25, 1:44). In other words, good plans and decisions on conceiving and parenting children should be central in the lives, homes and faith communities of all believers.

**Key FP Message from Christianity**

Family planning helps individuals, families and whole communities to:

- Carry out and fulfill the God-given stewardship and procreation role well;
- Avoid unplanned pregnancy, give birth to a child who is planned; and
- Determine a given number of children that are desired and to have them at the right time.⁴

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Islam

In Islam, the Holy Qur’an and Hadith are authoritative sources of teaching and guidance on FP. All the sources approve of reversible or temporary methods of contraception, however permanent methods are allowed only when the life of a woman is threatened.

*The Qur’an does not prohibit contraception, nor does it forbid a husband or wife to space pregnancies or limit their number.*

Guidance from the Holy Qur’an

The Qur’an does not prohibit contraception, nor does it forbid a husband or wife to space pregnancies or limit their number. Thus, the great majority of Islamic jurists believe that FP is permissible in Islam.5

The Qur’an specifically recommends that mothers breastfeed for two complete years: “and mothers should suckle their children for two whole years...” (Qur’an 2:233)

In the Qur’an, (exclusive) breastfeeding is mentioned 14 times as a method for birth spacing, demonstrating that the Qur’an supports breastfeeding as a birth spacing method. Also, there is a consensus among scholars based on a verse in the Qur’an that clearly states that spacing between children should be observed. Mothers are advised to breastfeed their children for two years, during which time the woman should not become pregnant. The Qur’an says: “The mothers shall give such to their offspring for two whole years, for those who desire to complete the term.” (Qur’an 2:233)

“And we have enjoined on man (to be dutiful and good) to his parents. His mother bore him in weakness and hardship, and his weaning is in two years.” (Qur’an 31:14)

Scholars describe these two years of breastfeeding mentioned in the Qur’an as a means of child spacing to give the mother adequate time to recover from pregnancy and childbirth and to care for the child. Also, the two years of breastfeeding mentioned in the Qur’an concur with the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendation on birth spacing.

*Scholars describe these two years of breastfeeding mentioned in the Qur’an as a means of child spacing to give the mother adequate time to recover from pregnancy and childbirth and to care for the child.*

Another Qur’anic guidance is on the "Divine Plan to Create Sexual Partners /Spouses and Divine Will" that the sexual partners hold dialogues on family and spousal peace. Surat Al-Rum 30:21, “And one of Allah’s signs is, that He has created for you mates from yourselves, that you dwell in tranquility with them, and has ordained between you love and mercy.”

(وَبَنَاتَنَا الْإِلَهَيْنَ بَيُّ الْخَلْقِ هُمُّ، وَهُمْ عَلَىٰ وَهُمْ وَفَقَهُ فِي عَلَمٍ... (سورة الروم، من الآية 21))

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6 All verses mentioned in the guide referring to Islamic holy texts can be found at [https://quran.com/](https://quran.com/).

This means it is desirable in Islam that spouses should discuss the use of FP methods before either of the spouses uses them. This is for purposes of peace and health in the home and for tranquility between spouses.

More Qur’anic Guidance

Al Baqarah 2:185: “Allah desires for you ease (Yusr); he desires not hardship (usr) for you…”

Al Nisa 4:26: “Allah desires to enlighten your burden for man was created weak…”

Hence Islam would be sympathetic of FP if spacing pregnancies and adjusting their numbers will make the mother more physically fit and the father more financially at ease, particularly since this is not antagonistic to any categorical text of prohibition in the Qur’an or Sunnah (Prophet sayings or deeds).

Al-Isra 17:29: “And let not your hand (in giving) be chained to your neck, nor yet open it to the extreme, lest you end up in rebuke, in beggary.”

Guidance from Hadith (Sayings of the Prophet Peace be Upon Him)

The Sunnah, a documentation of the Prophet Peace Be Upon Him (PBUH) tradition, indicates that coitus interruptus or withdrawal (ejaculation outside vagina or al azl) method was practiced during the time of the Prophet (PBUH).

Guidance 1 from Hadith

“We [the Companions of the Prophet] used to practice azl during the time of the Prophet. The Prophet knew about it and did not forbid it.”

The Sunnah does not directly address child spacing as such, but it talks about the Prophet (PBUH) noticing that his companions were practicing coitus interruptus (al azl). And when he heard about it, he did not forbid this practice. Therefore, his followers concluded that if it was anything that is not allowed in Islam, he could have stopped it immediately. The intention of al azl was to prevent pregnancy, just like the modern temporary methods.

Since child spacing through breastfeeding and al azl are permitted, Muslims are permitted to seek information and counseling on FP services. Holistic information should be given to couples and individuals to enable them to make informed decisions in line with their faith, beliefs and health status, and this should be part of pre-marital counseling.

Guidance 2 from Hadith

In a hadith authenticated by al-Bukhari, “the right due to a child from parents is to teach him writing, swimming, archery and to provide him with nothing but what is wholesome.”
Young men and women should be provided accessible, complete and accurate information about FP and FP methods, including their benefits so they can make decisions at the appropriate time in marriage, enabling them to provide for and care for their children.

**Guidance 3 from Hadith**

In a hadith authenticated by Ahmad ibn Hanbal, “Instruct your children in prayer at age seven, punish them if they fail at age ten, and let them sleep separately from one another.”

This hadith brings out the necessity to have planned procreation. The separate sleeping arrangements mean a separate room for boys and girls. Spacing of children and having the family size consistent with the family’s means are a part of the solution, as well as improving the housing situations of the family.⁸

**Guidance 4 from Hadith**

In one hadith narrated by Abdulllah bin Umar fil Mustadicrak, the Prophet (PBUH) said, “…it is a great misery to have too many children without means of supporting them…” In another hadith he said, “Too many children are the other face of poverty, and fewer children are the other face of comfort.” The explanation is that the strength of a Muslim community lies in having good, healthy and pious children that are educated and able to look after themselves in the future and be useful to the community, which calls for proper planning.

**Conclusion**

According to the vast majority of Islamic scholars, misinterpretation of Islamic teaching on contraception may discourage uptake of FP. Lack of reproductive health knowledge, cultural beliefs and lack of women’s decision-making power continue to be reasons for the unmet need for FP. Countering the negative notions of FP use requires active engagement of religious leaders and Muslim scholars who are in position of power and influence at the community level.¹⁰

**Key FP Message from Islam:**

Properly spacing births in a family is a very important way to protect the health of mothers and babies.

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Hinduism

The Hindu scriptures do not prohibit contraception or include anything that should discourage couples to space pregnancies.11 Hindu scriptures promote healthy families and respect between spouses.

An interfaith document on FP titled “Keeping the Faith in Sexual and Reproductive Health: Faithful Affirmations”12 supports the following themes.

From the earliest age

Hindu children are taught to revere the divine feminine, as embodied in Her multiplicity of forms from Sita, the perfect wife, to Saraswati, the Goddess of learning, to Radha, the Lover of God, to the heroic Durpa, the slayer of demons, and beyond.

Promotion of strong women

Hindu scriptures discuss the importance of promoting women’s strength. “Parents should gift their daughter intellectuality and power of knowledge.” (Rig Veda 10.85.7)13 “O woman may you be powerful like a rock. May you gain brilliance of the sun and have a long prosperous life that benefits all.” (Arthava Veda 14.1.47) Women have the same rights and responsibilities as men when it comes to FP with regard to the size of the family, the method of contraception, the wellbeing of sexual life and the wealth of the family.

Marriage is seen as a sacred bond that lasts lifetimes

Through marriage, a couple learns to love one another so they can more completely love God. For that reason, ancient scriptures like the Arthava Veda urge: “May the husband and wife be complementary to each other. May the husband be a song, the wife be a verse.” (14:2)14

Females and males are equally valued

All that is and all that ever existed is forever pure and undifferentiated from divinity itself. According to the most ancient Hindu scripture, Manusmriti, a daughter is equivalent to a son as there is no sex distinction in the “Atman” – the eternal soul, inseparable from God.15 Hence no one should (a) over produce children in an attempt to have male children, (b) kill children in or outside of the womb to guarantee a particular sex, and (c) mistreat a woman by denying access to family planning or subjecting her to violence of any kind.

Hindu Scriptures

Hindu scripture emphasizes that intimate relations should be respected as sacred and kept within the confines of marriage. “It is through their union (i.e., the marriage partners) that offspring results. Each has to emotionally fulfill the vow of being faithful to the higher values of life.” (Arthava Veda 14.2.7)

14 Hindu American Foundation. Vedic Teachings About Womanhood.
Bahá’í

Family planning is left to the personal conscience of a follower of the Bahá’í faith, although there is some guidance regarding specific situations, such as:

- Irreversible sterilization in either sex is discouraged unless there is a medical condition relevant to the decision, in which case the individual would seek qualified medical advice.
- Abortion is permitted only where there are strong medical grounds such as risk to the mother’s life and health. Abortion is not regarded lightly and is not permitted as a contraceptive measure.
- Artificial insemination and in-vitro fertilization are permitted provided that the wife’s egg is fertilized by the husband’s sperm and that the child is born from the womb of the natural mother.16
- Though the birth of a child is a time of joy and Bahá’ís may wish to express their gratitude to God with prayer, they have no rituals associated with birth.17

Sikhism

Sikhs have no objection to contraception.18 Whether or not Sikhs use contraception, and the form of contraception used, is a matter for individual couples to decide.19 NP Singh, other Sikh scholars and leaders speak of the vision of the founder of the Sikh tradition, Guru Nanak, as one in which we are all spiritual beings “who have realized God.” So how do we realize God in family health and family planning?

We are realizing God when we recognize that:

- We are spiritual beings and that the earth, the universe and the children born and not yet are all sacred.
- All life is unity.
- Our mission is the spiritualization of all.
- The reality that humans create around themselves is a reflection of their inner state.
- The current situation includes pregnancies that are dangerous for women and girls, including those that are too early, too frequent, too many or too late in a woman’s life. These pregnancies have negative health effects on the women and children, which can affect families, their communities and countries.

Buddhism

Buddhist attitudes on contraception are based on the idea that it is wrong to kill for any reason. The most common Buddhist view on FP is that contraception is acceptable if it prevents conception, but that contraceptives that work by stopping the development of a fertilized egg are wrong and should not be used.20

Unlike some other religions, Buddhism does not regard having children as a religious duty, except in the sense that having children in the family whose religious devotion leads them to being monks is highly revered and treasured. To seek enlightenment, Buddhists should not pursue sexual pleasure. If, however, they engage in sexual activity that is non-reproductive by virtue of using contraception that prevents conception, that is acceptable.21

Finally, FP as a personal and family issue, a community health and societal need and a global and development challenge is, in Buddhism, not discussed in the language of rights, but rather in terms of benefit and harm to a family and from within an intention of relieving human suffering. If spacing, postponing, limiting and or abstaining from having children will contribute to limiting or overcoming suffering, family planning is encouraged. There are no dogmas in Buddhism that influence the size of a family, but the family head is asked to fulfill certain caring duties toward his immediate family and, by extension, toward society at large.22

If spacing, postponing, limiting and or abstaining from having children will contribute to limiting or overcoming suffering, family planning is encouraged.

Section 3: Key Sermon Messages

Introduction

The messages about family planning that can be used by faith and lay leaders during sermons and other opportunities fall under six themes. These six areas encourage community engagement and advocacy:

1. Societal Governance Duties and Community Leadership Obligations on FP
2. Boosting Male Involvement in FP
3. Inequalities and Injustices Hindering FP
4. Partnerships and Collaboration for Enhanced FP
5. Fostering Intergenerational Dialogue
6. Enhancing Servant Leadership, Passion and Solidarity for Greater FP

Unmet Need in Family Planning and Child Spacing Among Women

The concept of unmet need for FP is useful for identifying women and families who may want to use, but are not currently using, a method of contraception.

A concept infrequently preached and discussed among faith leaders and communities is that if all women who wanted to avoid a pregnancy were to use a modern contraceptive method, abortions as well as unplanned births would drop dramatically. Reducing unmet need is also an important strategy to lower fertility rates in communities and countries with too rapid a population growth that is not aligned with growth in the economy, including jobs and housing, and increased food and industrial production.

Below are the advantages of using FP methods:

- Avoid health risks to a breastfeeding child from premature cessation of breastmilk due to another pregnancy before two years;
- Avoid health risks to the mother that would result from repeated pregnancies, short birth intervals or young age;
- Avoid the economic hardships of caring for a larger family, which might compel parents to resort to illegal activities or exhausting themselves to earn a living;
- Allow for comprehensive education, which is more feasible with fewer children; and
- Some methods protect against sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.

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A March 2022 report said nearly half of all pregnancies globally are unintended. Please find specific statistics on your country on The Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) Program website (https://dhsprogram.com/).

Most faith leaders and their followers share a deeply held conviction that all families, regardless of their religious beliefs, are entitled to lead healthy lives free from suffering and deprivation. But, tragically, an absence of basic FP services (or if available, lack of awareness that services exist and a capability to access services) deprives millions of women, families and communities of this fundamental right every year.

Sermons focused on addressing this issue can help millions of women and families in your country and worldwide who lack access to modern contraceptives to plan children for their wellbeing with greater spiritual confidence and moral conviction.

**Thankful Messages**

What progress do we have to thank the divine for? Thankful messages to be incorporated into any sermon messages:

- Faith-run and faith-owned institutions and facilities help to provide FP information, services and supplies. This gives people the knowledge and capability to choose when and how many children they would like to have.

- Many faith leaders, communities and congregations across faiths encourage conversations and generate educational materials that provide a religious context and cultural awareness that makes FP options more acceptable, accessible and affordable.

**Six Main Messages that Can Be Applied to Your Specific Religious and Geographic Context**

1. **Societal Governance and Community Leadership Obligations on FP**

   **Description of Challenge:** Empowering individuals to determine the number and timing of pregnancies, including the voluntary use of methods for preventing pregnancy – not including abortion – harmonious with their values and religious beliefs is a theological, ethical and pastoral duty of faith and lay leaders and individual believers. Fulfilling this duty contributes to achieving their overall faith obligations to love neighbor as self and to attain righteousness and spiritual fulfillment through preaching, modeling and enhancing holistic life and health, human dignity, peace, equity, and justice. Unfortunately, cultures and traditions don’t change overnight. Long-term investment is required to promote greater understanding and encourage collective action.

   **Key Message:** Divine courage and commitment is needed to provide adequate leadership for enhanced FP.

   - Good societal governance and effective community leadership is about having the conviction, the courage and the commitment to do what is best for the health and wellbeing of local communities, families and individual citizens. As community leaders and societal governors, we must seek to make FP information, services and products available and affordable to the people. As leaders, we must not expect everyone to agree with everything we believe, do or say. But we are still called upon to love them and not be afraid to be decisive in empowering mothers and fathers,

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25 UNFPA, State of World Population 2022, [https://www.unfpa.org/swp2022](https://www.unfpa.org/swp2022)
families and communities. If we are going to be good leaders in bringing about greater family health and security and higher family development and transformation, we must stand for family planning and be decisive and unapologetic about it. Making important decisions that support the health of children and their mothers, fathers and whole families goes with the job of leadership. In certain situations, major decisions require firmness, authority and finality that in the end will deliver great joy to God, and to children, mothers and families.

- Identify scriptural references on the subject of leadership, courage and commitment, love for and solidarity with others, and apply them to FP.

2. Boosting Male Involvement in FP

Description of Challenge: There is a focus of FP messaging on girls and women. As a result, many boys and men are still unreached and not empowered or encouraged to reflect on various issues related to effective FP such as reflecting on gender norms, faith and culture and on the impact of family size on family resources, food, health care, housing and education needs.

Key Message: No one should be left behind. Everyone should have love and support, and men must be responsible and should be involved in FP.

- Inclusive family health and holistic wellbeing for families demands that no one should be left out of accessing adequate information, help and support for FP. Family love and solidarity means boys and men are lovingly and equally involved in prayer and decision making, information gathering as well as in planning with the girls and women in need of FP.

3. Inequalities and Injustices that Hinder FP

Description of Challenge: Due to lack of education or economic means or status, many people are not able to access FP information and services. This hinders them from filling their reproductive health, parenting, and family health needs and reaching their potential.

Key Message: We are called to serve the least and the last in capabilities, access and utilization of FP information, skills and services.

- All great religions and faith traditions are founded and built around serving those in need. We are called to preach and model love, equity and justice for the vulnerable and disadvantaged genders, age groups, families and communities when it comes to FP availability, affordability and usage.

4. Partnerships and Collaborations for Enhanced FP

Description of Challenge: It is in faith community congregational spaces that we find people of a variety of ages, professions and communities, including local and community leaders. There are missed opportunities for collaboration in faith communities and houses of worship to enhance family planning education, service provision, pastoral care, counseling, referrals and advocacy.

Key Message: To promote healthy alliances, collaborations and partnerships is to promote life, health and fulfillment for all the human body.

- This works best when all the body parts and systems are working in a synchronized manner. We humans, our families and communities as well as our leadership and governance teams were created for community, communion and cooperation. We all need allies with whom we can plan and work in many areas of life and more so in regards to bridging and meeting a community’s family planning needs. Almost all religions have stories around great men and women who succeeded in their community leadership and societal governance roles because they created
strong partnerships, teams and alliances at different levels, in different sectors and with different community groups.

- Additional recommendation: Invite health care staff to speak with your community on FP and related issues.

5. Fostering Intergenerational Dialogue on FP

**Description of Challenge:** There are limited partnerships and collaboration among different generations or socioeconomic groups.

**Key Message:** Train children and empower youth to live healthy lives and flourish.

- Intergenerational dialogues are interactive, personal and empathic in nature. They bring together older and younger generations and are intended to create shared knowledge and meaning and a collective experience around the importance for planning families, the births of children and their parenting in the most empowering manner. A better understanding of each other, answering each other’s questions and sharing hopes, fears and anxieties related to FP helps prepare youth to handle their sexual, reproductive and family health responsibilities with more confidence. This will lead to better decision making and higher chances of success. Family, community and one-on-one dialogues have various benefits to the people involved.

- Good dialogues help improve the youth’s confidence and understanding of the importance of accurate information about sexual and reproductive health and encourage them to make responsible choices.

- Greater understanding about the importance of family planning and equipping youth with accurate information will help overcome cultural and religious challenges and other barriers to youth’s access to sexual, reproductive and family health information and services.

- Educate youth and first-time parents on FP.

- Create mutual understanding, trust and solidarity on FP between different generations, family members and community groups.

6. Enhancing Servant Leadership, Passion and Solidarity for Greater FP

*This message and sermon is most appropriate when talking to other faith and lay leaders.*

**Description of Challenge:** Many communities have limited knowledge, unhealthy attitudes, and unfounded fears and myths about FP. In addition, they live in areas with limited FP services and skilled providers. These communities will need more servant leaders who are passionate about improving family and community health in general and who are very intentional in preventing unplanned pregnancies and the suffering and deaths of children and mothers that result.

Many people of faith lack the FP education opportunities, empowerment, capabilities and user-friendly spaces to make informed, healthy and holistically fulfilling decisions for their sexual, reproductive and family health. Also, the faith sector, civil society and governments’ investments in FP education, empowerment and service provision are still low compared to the need.

**Key Message:** Servant leaders sacrifice themselves to serve and satisfy others’ health and peace, dignity and wellbeing.

- More often than not, our leadership abilities, skills and authority are used in the service of our personal satisfaction, including what we want to be said and done rather than what the most
disadvantaged and vulnerable need to boost their health and wellbeing and ultimately, the health and wellbeing of everyone.

• Considering the number of lives lost each year, the types of sicknesses and complications endured by women and the multiple traumas suffered by families because women were not supported in their wish to delay pregnancy, the urgency and the extent to which a leader uses his or her office, authority and connections to come to the family planning rescue of these women and families is what counts as servant leadership, which all faiths and spiritualities believe.
NOTES