

Apostolic Ministry to Widows in the New Testament: Implications for the Christian Church in Nigeria

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Abstract: This paper examined the early Christian Church response to the plight of widows in Acts 6:1 where the Grecian widows were neglected in the daily distribution of food in favour of the Hebrew widows. There is an apparent neglect and unjust treatment of widows in our Christian churches in Nigeria. In spite of the Christian teachings that emphasize love and caring especially towards the grieving and vulnerable widows, we still see disrespect and humiliation of women when death knocks at the door of their husbands. This disproportionate injustice against widows, cut across cultures as a form of gender-based violence against women. Considering the traditional socialization that entrench dependence and passivity for women, the question is, how can the Church overcome the sentiments of cultural differences and assist widows in their plight to ameliorate their sufferings? This paper, used secondary data to explore the issues raised in this narrative and argues that the early Christian model of concerns for the needy provides an exemplary model for the Christian Church today in addressing the concerns of minority voices in the congregation. There is need for sustained educational awareness and women empowerment as panacea for widows' neglect.

Keywords: Marriage, Widowhood, Empathetic Ministry, Church, culture.

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I. INTRODUCTION

There is an apparent, deliberate, uncaring, disrespectful, discriminatory, impolite and unjust treatment of widows in our societies today and majority of these widows belong to conservative Christian Churches. In spite of the Christian teachings that emphasize love and caring especially towards the grieving and vulnerable widows, we still see sufferings and humiliation of women when they lose their husbands by death. Injustices against widow cut across cultures and it is a form of gender-based abuse against women. Such was the case in Acts 6:1 where the Grecian widows were discriminated against and the Hebrew widows favoured in terms of daily distribution of food for their upkeep until the early church took a deliberate action to right the wrongs by electing leaders in the Church that took care of the widows. On the surface, the daily distribution of food may seem trivial but beneath the cause of this crisis is the great animosity that had existed between the Hebraic Jews and the Hellenistic Jews. The Hellenistic Jews otherwise referred to as the Grecian Jews are first mentioned in the Bible in Acts 6:1: The Bible says: "In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic (Grecian) Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food." The believing Jews are here divided into two groups. The first were those who had remained in Judea, near Jerusalem, who used the Hebrew language, and who were appropriately called "Hebrews." The second group consisted of those who were scattered among the Gentiles, who spoke the Greek language, and who used the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint. These were called "Hellenists," from a word meaning "Greek" or "Greek-speaking (Thurstone, Bonnie (2012)

Dissensions arose between the Hellenistic Jews and the Hebraic Jews over the distribution of daily rations for the Grecian widows. The Hebrew group of widows were favoured over the Hellenist widows. Sadly, this animosity and strife between the two groups was not eliminated by their conversion to Christianity. However, the apostles recognized their concerns raised by one part of the Church as genuine. They reflected on it and brilliantly worked through the dispute by creating the office of deacons (Acts 6:2-6).

Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables."³ "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;"⁴ "but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."⁵ And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch (Acts 6:1-5)

II. THE STATUS OF WIDOWS חַנְּמָלָא (*ALMANÂ*) IN THE ANCIENT TIMES

Widowhood was not a desirable position to be in the ancient times. Widows were often confronted with financial struggles (1kg 4:1) and they were certainly among the most helpless in ancient society (Deut 10:18; Isa 54:4). The Old Testament in the Bible paints graphic pictures of how widows were perceived in the Jewish culture (Block, 2003). The Hebrew word חַנְּמָלָא (*almanâ*), (Ex 22:22-24; Ps 68:5; 94:6; Prov 15:25; Isa 1:23; Jer 7:6; 22:3; 49:11; Mal 3:5) refers to a widow who, has lost her social and economic position because of the death of her husband (Strong, 2001). The root word for *almanâ* refers to a desolate place or a desert. Brown (1989) argues that the word *almanâ* does not only suggest the death of the husband but also the ideas of “loneliness, abandonment and helplessness”. The word pictures presented by these two authors, describe in a nutshell the life of widows, which is usually characterized by loneliness, sorrow, abandonment and desperation. Etymologically חַנְּמָלָא (*almanâ*) widowhood, is a metaphor for destitution, helplessness and an unanswerable grief.

Widows in Old Testament times constituted a special group of women who faced unique challenges that were worsened by some of the socio-cultural settings of the time. Leeb (2001) argues that the Hebrew world of the first century was predominantly patriarchal and so the idea of the independent woman did not exist at that time. This was because a woman, in the first century was considered as her father’s property until she is married. It is assumed therefore, that her husband has bought her with the bride price that is paid on her behalf. It is therefore imagined that women’s lives were imbedded in man and so apart from a man, a woman had no place in the socio-cultural formation of that time. Camille (2002) further observes, that when a woman loses her husband “and her father’s house is no longer an option, she then becomes a property of the oldest son’s inheritance. Therefore a widow who had no son became a destitute. This could probably be one of the reasons why sons were highly valued and esteemed in the Oriental culture (Gen 29:32-35; Ps 127:4,5; Isa 9:6,7) a tradition that is still in practice in some cultures in Nigeria (Fasoranti & Aruna, 2007). Thus the death of the husband marked the beginning of sorrow and desolation for a widow living in that culture.

Bremmer and Lourens, (1995) also observe that, according to the Canaanite cultural practice of the time, widows were required to shave their hair and put on mourning garments as soon as their husbands died and were supposed to remain in that condition until they either remarry or died. This kind of dressing made them easily identifiable in the public thus making them targets of abuse. Hiebert, (2001) observes that the חַנְּמָלָא (*almanâ* -widow) and the *ger*, (alien, sojourner) existed at the mercy of the society. A society where kinship ties gave one identity, meaning, and protection, but the “*almanâ*” and the “*ger*” had no such ties. Unlike, the “*ger*” however, the widow (*almanâ*) lived in a “shaky obscure environment as a woman” (p.130). On the other hand, Tate (2000) observes that orphans, widows and those without families were subject to oppression in the societies of the ancient world. Such oppression include but not limited to the dispossession of the family inheritance. The foregoing statements sheds some light into the challenging experiences of widows and orphans. In all ages it has been a common practice for the wicked to take advantage of the vulnerable ones, because they are perceived as having no one to defend them.

In the Old Testament times, people who had no male representatives were at a disadvantage because they did not have anyone to secure their rights or basic needs. This is why Job the patriarch claims that he freely gave food to the poor, the widow and the orphan (Job 31:16,17). Such a statement suggests that widows were known by their destitution in the society. Some widows lived in such poverty that they were forced to go begging for their survival and upkeep (Job 31:16). The Biblical narrative about the ministry of Elisha who helped a widow whose two sons were about to be taken as slaves by creditors (2Kgs 4:1-7) portrays the vulnerability of children at the demise of their fathers. The widow mentioned in the narrative was married to one of the prophets, (an ordained gospel minister), stationed at Ramah who died without a ‘living will’, hence the family was left at the mercy of the creditors. If the creditors in this story were able to threaten the late prophet’s wife, the implications are that the ordinary widows were in a more difficult situation than she was. Indeed God rebuked creditors who took widows’ garments or whatever property for a pledge (Deut 24:17; Job 24:3). The fact that such actions had to be prohibited is suggestive of their frequent occurrences.

On the other hand, Ebeling (2010) points out that women were not allowed to stand in public courts and so widows had no one to represent them. This cultural practice provided an opportunity for the perpetration of evil against the helpless women. Dishonest judgments were also rendered in their absence to cheat and dispossess them of the little that they had. This is revealed in the several instances where God rebuked Israel for taking advantage of the widow and the orphan. Wicked men are portrayed in these texts as plundering the poor including widows and orphans.

III. THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH AND MINISTRY TO WIDOWS

Widows in the Apostolic Church era according to Brown (were in a very difficult position because there were few employment opportunities, and few, if any, social services provided by the Roman government. Again the poor were left vulnerable. The believers at Jerusalem sold property and possessions in

order to share with those who were in need (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-34). There was not a needy person among them (4:34). Acts 2:41-47 and 4:32-37 reveals that the unity and togetherness of early Christians enabled them to share whatever they had as a Christian community.

The benevolent lifestyle of the early Church is well chronicled in the history of the Christian Church. During the reign of the Roman Emperor Claudius, when a famine adversely affected the brethren in Judea, the disciples at Antioch determined to send a contribution for their relief (Acts 11:27-30). They sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. The primary work of elders and Deacons was primarily to take care of the spiritual, social and physical needs of the church (Acts 20:28-29; 1 Pet 5:1-2). The elders knew which members of the congregation needed assistance and they responded accordingly.

Again during the reign of Nero, the churches of Macedonia and Achaia sent a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1-2; Rom 15:25-26; 2 Cor 8 - 9). This practice of the early Church in matters of taking care of the needy was imbedded in the gospel, which they preached (1 Cor 16:15-16; Gal 6:10; Eph 4:28; 1 Tim 6:18). In their endeavor to relieve the suffering of the needy, the Apostolic Church paid particular attention to the needs of widows.

According to Towner (2006), the death of a husband in the Greco-Roman empire raised questions about the disposition of the dowry (given by the wife's family to the husband for oversight). The widow might find herself without support if the dowry, as part of the husband's property, were to pass directly to the children, if she were too old or otherwise unable to remarry. Sometimes there were neither dowry nor family to provide for her needs. This cultural practice led to an increase of destitute women.

The benevolent acts of grace and charity to the poor enabled widows to find a safe haven in the early Christian church. Act 6:1 shows that widows were taken care of from church coffers and freewill offerings from members. Such a kind gesture to the needy obviously led to the number of widows that embraced the Christian faith from other socio-cultural groups aside from the Hebrews and this circumstance created a huge problem hence the need to care for these widows became a glaring reality to the Church. Bacchiocchi, (2000) observed that the apostles were made forcefully aware of such a need soon after Pentecost by the murmuring of the Hellenists over the apparent neglect of their widows (Acts 6:1). To address the problem seven men of good repute and full of the Spirit were appointed to serve in the welfare ministry of the church (Acts 6:3).

The book of Acts also refers to a woman named Tabitha or Dorcas, who took care of widows and orphans (Acts 9:36-39). Bacchiocchi (2000) observes that the fact that widows attended her funeral in great numbers suggests that she herself was probably one of the widows of the local church (p.50). This further supports the benevolent nature of the New Testament Church in that even widows ministered to other widows.

In James 1:27 true religion is defined as "... to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." Such emphasis on practical godliness and practical religion gave power and tremendous influence to the early Christian Church. The Apostolic Church demonstrated timeless principles of managing church growth and responding to various calls of ministry in a holistic way. The Church did not only focus on spiritual matters but realized the closeness of physical, social and spiritual needs of its members. This kind of teaching is the core of the Gospel Commission. The Apostle Paul's first letter to Timothy explains that unbelievers are those who refuse to care for their own widows, not even those living with them in their own households (1 Timothy 5:8).

IV. CHRIST'S MINISTRY TO WIDOWS

Christ paid special attention to widows in His ministry to suffering humanity. A significant aspect of Christ's ministry was His compassion (*splanchnizomai*) towards the suffering of humanity (Mat 9:35,36; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34; Mark 1:41; 6:34; 8:2). Thomas (2013) observes that the use of the word *splanchnizomai* shows that Christ's ministry to suffering humanity was never motivated by a desire to display his power but rather to respond to perceived needs of the suffering people. The ministry of Christ was characterized by His constant effort to minister to the physical, social, mental and spiritual needs of people. Reaching out to the whole person was the burden of His ministry.

For this reason, Jesus defended the cause of the widows and orphans throughout his ministry. He rebuked Pharisees for devouring widows' houses (Luke 20:46, 47). The Greek word translated "devour" *katesthio*, according to Bock (2008) has different shades of meanings but essentially refers to the act of plundering of properties. This act describes the unscrupulous acts of the temple leaders in dispossessing widows of their inheritance through all forms of injustice like charging usury, grabbing their property and stealing welfare money from the temple. Bock suggests that the use of the word *katesthio* suggests that the temple authorities misused funds allocated to the support for the poor.

It is possible to assume that the scribes and the Pharisees took the poor people's homes for pledges, charged exorbitant fees for legal advice on matters of inheritance, gave themselves hefty fees for managing widows' estates and ignored the cry of the oppressed. White posits that the Jewish leaders "gained the confidence of pious widows, and then represented it as a duty for them to devote their property to religious

purposes. Having secured control of their money, the wily schemers used it for their own benefit (White, 1980) thus, instead of the temple becoming a safe haven for the suffering, it was transformed into a place where the poor were plundered and disposed of the little that they had.

Green (2005) points out that the Pharisees and Scribes knew God's law about inheritances, but they apparently devised legal mechanisms to circumvent the scriptures especially those that sort to defend the cause of the poor. What is apparent is that these church leaders did not see widows as God sees them but saw only how they could take advantage of this low class of vulnerable women. They distanced themselves from the people at large by their concerns with public honor and their blatant neglect of the poor. Therefore, by rebuking them, Jesus sort to bring them back to the claims of the scriptures regarding the exercise of justice.

Furthermore, Bock (2008) posits that Christ's concern over the plight of widows provides the basis for the miracle of the resurrection of a widow's son at Nain as recorded in Luke 7:11-17. He describes the woman whose only son had died not only as a widow but also bereft of anyone to take care of her, making the funeral procession emotional and the situation desperate. Jesus took the initiative to address and comfort the widow (Luke 7:13). The words he used to comfort the widow in Greek is (*me-klaie*) which is translated "don't cry" This expressed a deep human empathy for the situation. Nolland points out that Jesus responded in compassion to the needs of the widow and demonstrated in practical terms the importance of compassionate ministry by attending the funeral and placing himself where he could be of help to the bewildered woman, Christ revealed the tenets of compassionate ministry. Nichol further highlights that Jesus answered the unuttered prayer of the widow though she had not petitioned him verbally.¹ Jesus touched the bier, an act that would bring defilement according to the law (Num 19:11, 16) and commanded the dead to rise. By this act of mercy towards the widow of Nain, Christ demonstrated his love and care for even the bereaved.

Again, Christ commended a widow who gave all what she had to God (Luke 21: 1-4). This passage comes just after Christ had rebuked the teacher of the law for "... devouring widows" (Luke 20:47). The connection between the passages presents a remarkable contrast of the spirit behind the teachers of the law and the poor widow. In support of this position, Nichol (1980) observes that Jesus intended the spirit of this widow to stand in bold contrast with the attitude of the Pharisees towards widows. Her private action of giving all that she had to give resulted from her devotion to God in her heart. Ryken (2009) suggests that the word Jesus used to describe the widow's financial situation, *hysterematos* indicates extreme poverty. Yet Jesus pointed out to them that her gift was the greatest because she had given all she had to God.

By recognizing the gift offered by the widow, Bock (2008) observes that Jesus demonstrated that He valued the spirit of sacrifice not the largeness of the gift and by this gesture He elevated the whole-hearted contribution of poor widows in the church. Christ elevated widows to their rightful position as God's children who are capable of rendering acceptable worship to the Lord. By commending the sacrifice of the widow, Jesus condemned the spirit of disregard upon the underprivileged. As a result of Christ's indisputable defense and ministry to the widows and orphans, White, (1980) points out that widows and orphans exalted the name of Jesus for his works of mercy to them.

4.1 Christ's ministry to widows on the cross

The most compelling example of Christ's concern for widows was shown as he hung on the cross. While hanging on the cross, Christ commended His mother- a widow by then to John's care (John 19:25-27). Kostenberger and Andreas (2002) observes that Jesus gave the 'disciple He loved' charge of His mother, perhaps because His own brothers still did not believe in him. What is of paramount importance in this narrative, is to note that Christ's command from the cross regarding the care for His mother, a widow, remains a compelling principle to live by because many are neglecting widows even their own mothers. What Jesus Christ did for His mother while dying on the cross is characteristic of His love for widows. Pink (2005, p.181) writes, "He was performing the mightiest work of all history; He was engaged in doing that which in comparison makes the creating of a world fade into utter significance, yet He forgets not to make provision for His mother." By this act, Christ did not only reveal His empathy, compassion and love for widows and the underprivileged, but He demonstrated what true religion is all about. Jesus is the ultimate example of selflessness and sacrifice. Believers are mandated to be imitators of God and to live a life of love (Ephesians 5:1, 2) hence the challenge is to become like God in our character formation. (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:36; 2 Peter 2:21). The poor, disenfranchised, suffering, and marginalized in society are precious to God (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18; 6:20; 7:22). Jesus cared for the oppressed and the downtrodden (Luke 4:18,19). God's overall view of caring with compassion for those who are suffering can be summed up in Galatians 6:10, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially those who belong to the family of believers." Christ also demonstrated that the final judgment that separates the righteous from the wicked is based on how the weak and the suffering are treated (Mat 25:31-46).

V. PAULINE COUNSEL ON MINISTRY TO WIDOWS

The growing number of widows as a result of the general numerical growth of the Apostolic Church brought some new challenges to the believers. White (1980) observes that the Church was continually enlarging, and this growth in membership brought increasingly heavy burdens upon those in charge. The needs and desires of those cared for needed some balancing with the resources that were available. Some of the challenges are reflected in Paul's first pastoral epistle to Timothy. Mounce, (2000) pointed out that a serious problem developed in the Ephesian church because some widows who were enrolled on the charity list were not supposed to be enrolled probably because of their age. Therefore Paul addressed the problem 1Timothy 5:3-16. Apostle Paul had earlier on, exhorted the younger widows unable to exercise self-control to marry (1Cor 7:8,9). In 1Corinthians 7:39, Paul declares that a woman whose husband has died is free to marry as long as she marries in the Lord. Johnson (2008) observed that by this statement, Paul recognized that not everyone has a gift of celibacy. He then proceeded to define the "real widow" (*ontoscherai*) that deserved to be included on the church's charity list (1Tim 5:3, 5, 9, 16). Towner (2006) observed that by adding a qualifier *ontos*, which means 'real, actual or genuine', Paul implied a need to redefine the meaning of *cherosin* view of the challenges the church was facing. Church resources were stretched to the point that it was not possible to care for those who truly needed and deserved financial help. Paul plainly exhorts that a widow with children or grandchildren should be cared for by them. The parents have contributed immeasurably to their children and grandchildren's welfare. Now it is their turn "to make some return" (1Tim 5: 4) to their widowed mother or grandmother. The apostle commended that such a practice is "acceptable" or pleasing in the sight of God (1Tim 5: 4).

Young widows were to be removed from the list because by their inability to control themselves, they needed to marry and take care of their families (1Tim 5:11-15). Johnson (2008) observed that older widows made some kind of pledge to the Lord and to the church to the effect that they would remain single so as to devote the remaining part of their lives to serve the Lord. If a younger widow made such a pledge, but then started wishing to marry again, she would thus go back on her pledge and incur the censure of the church. Paul is not condemning the natural desire of a younger widow to remarry. What is wrong is the breaking of a pledge.

Paul emphasized that it was not proper for younger widows to stay on the enrolment list while indulging in a life of idleness (1Tim 5:13) that finds expression in their wandering from house to house and gossiping. Johnson (2008) alleged that the idea of having elders and deacons in the church supporting sexually interested young widows was and is still a socially offensive pattern of behavior hence Apostle Paul determined to protect the public image of the Church by giving them the guideline of behaviour. Paul's primary concern in this passage according to Mounce (2000), was to help Timothy distinguish between widows whom the church should support and those whom they should not. 1Timothy 5:3-16 provides evidence not only of problems but also of measures taken to care for widows. Paul's concern is that the Ephesian church should take care of the widows who are truly in need.

Furthermore, Nichol identifies three categories of widows in 1Timothy 5:3-16; those who could support themselves from their children or other relatives; those who are completely destitute of family support and those that lived in pleasure and receiving material support by other means other than their relatives or the church (Nichol, 1980). Paul pointed out that only the second category of widows were eligible for consistent support from the church. The implication of this passage is that the church had committed itself to support some young widows who, because of their age, idleness, and heresy had turned against the church and so these were supposed to be removed from the welfare register.

According to Apostle Paul in 1Timothy 5:3-16, real widows were firstly those that were truly alone, without any family for support. This included those who were not contemplating marriage. Secondly, they were supposed to be godly women who demonstrated commitment to the Lord through their deeds of mercy and charity. A "widow indeed" is a godly woman over sixty (1Tim 5: 9) who has no one to help her. Paul emphasizes that a true widow is one who fixes her hope on God (1Tim5: 5) and is a woman of prayer. Because the problem in Ephesus involved young widows hence Paul advised Timothy to include only those who were sixty years of age and above. Excell(2009) argues that a woman over sixty in Asia Minor could no longer work for sustenance. Therefore, they were to receive constant and generous support from the Church. Mounce(2000) argues that this does not mean that the church could ignore widows who did not fit into this category. It simply means that the church was not supposed to enter into a formal, lifelong relationship with widows who did not fit into the special category specified. Thus the obligation of the Church to take care of widows remains. In this passage the apostle Paul was emphasizing the need for discernment in church governance. I argue that the challenge of caring for widows and the elderly can be better understood and addressed if the Church would focus on their specific needs.

VI. WIDOWHOOD PRACTICE IN NIGERIA AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Many cultures in Nigeria share similarities in widowhood practices with the ancient Jewish tradition such as shaving of the widow's hair and subjecting them to special dress code. Some of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria that practice this, are the Yoruba, Igbo and minority groups as the Tiv, Idoma, Urhobo, Isan and including those in Edo and Delta States. These cultures observe a mourning period that is intense at the demise of a husband. This may range from a few days to a year. And during this period the widows' appearance is distinct by the way she dresses either in black or white clothing with grieving expressions just as it were in the Canaanite culture were widows were required to shave their hair and put on mourning garments as soon as their husbands died and were supposed to remain in that condition until they either remarry or died (Bremmer & Bosch, 1995). This kind of dressing made them easily identifiable in the public thus making them targets of abuse.

There are two other elements in widowhood practices that are widely shared; levirate marriage and disinheritance for the widow. After the mourning period, the widow in Yoruba, Igbo or Tiv ethnic group is expected to remarry to a relative of her late husband (Eweluka, 2002). This practice is on the decline in Nigeria due to civilization and Christian religious influence thus making levirate marriages unattractive and acceptable. The crust of this paper is on how the Christian Church can intervene to ameliorate the sufferings of widows in our society just like the early Christian Church did in Acts 6:1-6. Widowhood is still a big issue in many cultures in Nigeria and affects women in conservative Christian Churches as well. Despite the fact that this status is becoming more common because of war, poverty and political instability, widowhood remains an issue people are hesitant to speak about and confront the traditional cultural practices that promote the sufferings of widows. This hesitancy is also present in conservative Christian Churches. First and foremost, many ministers are not trained on how to support women who have not lost their husbands nor are they trained on how to confront cultural practices that discriminate against widows. It is observed that sometimes, ministers often do not even see what is wrong with such cultural practices. Thus leaving widows unsupported in their time of need. Church leaders, as it was demonstrated in Acts 6:2-6; have tremendous potential for educating and empowering communities to treat women in general, and widows specifically, with respect and dignity. It is worthy of note that God's displeasure on those who take advantage of widows, in the Jewish tradition is still applicable today in our modern society. God emphatically says in the scripture, do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. 23 If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. 24 My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless (Exod 22:22-24 NIV)

6.1 Conclusion and Recommendations

I have argued in this paper that the plight of widows in the early Christian Church is akin to the kind of widowhood practices that is seen in the Nigerian society today. The paper highlights that widows in Nigeria constitute a sizeable marginalized population in the society due to cultural factors on the estate of widowhood. While their numbers are exceedingly multiplying, their social economic condition deteriorates with painful experiences of war, neglect, and poverty. The awareness of widows in our society ought to be in the front burner of the nation's economic policy and the Church has a part to play in alleviating the plight of widows. A proper understanding of compassionate ministry would require us not merely to meet the immediate needs of widows for food and clothing, but also their need for human relationships, companionship, and even their desire to continue to contribute to the Church community in which ever way they can. Therefore, the need for ministry to widows and orphans should be the passion of every citizen in the Nigerian society irrespective of faith affiliation. There is no doubt that the needs of widows will continue to be on the increase as the world become increasingly impersonal with cultural inhibitions that are injurious to women's health and wellness. The followings are therefore recommended.

1. Therefore there is the need for the church and other well-meaning religious organizations in Nigeria to champion the cause of protecting widows and orphans in our society.
2. There is the need for education and a sustained economic empowerment program for women geared towards helping widows to recover from the loss of their spouse. Widows who are able to work for sustenance should be encouraged to take on jobs that would provide them livelihood
3. There is the need for the Church to enlighten the populace on the estate of widowhood and the special care they deserve in living normal lives even after the demise of their spouses. In doing this, the Church should de-emphasize the power of customs and tradition that dehumanizes widows.
4. The Girl-child education should be encouraged in places where they are being discountenanced in Nigeria. This will go a long way to equip women with their rights and privileges as to reject any traditional customs and practices that dehumanizes them,
5. The Church should encourage husbands and wives to make adequate provisions for their families by leaving behind a 'Living will' that could cater for the welfare of the surviving spouse and their children at

the end of life. The lack of any written will pertaining to property inheritance, places the surviving spouse and children at a disadvantage thus complicating the plight of widows.

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