

**THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH
IN THE CONTEXT OF WOMEN LIVING WITH HIV AND AIDS:
A CASE STUDY OF ST. ALOIS CATHOLIC RURAL MISSION STATION,
GWERU DIOCESE – ZIMBABWE**

BY

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. It is being submitted for the degree of MASTERS OF THEOLOGY (MINISTERIAL STUDIES) in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Science, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

Signed

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Date

As Supervisor, I agree to the submission of this dissertation for examination

Signed

PROFESSOR EDWINA WARD

Date

DEDICATION

I humbly dedicate this thesis to my Congregation [Sisters of the Child Jesus, Gweru Diocese – Zimbabwe]. I also dedicate it to the women who are living with HIV and AIDS, especially those in the rural parts of Zimbabwe.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABCD	Asset Based Community Development
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ARVs	Antiretroviral Drugs
EFZ	Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
FTLRP	Fast Track Land Reform Programme
HIV	Human Immune Virus
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
WARC	World Alliance of Reformed Churches
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front
ZCBC	Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference
ZCC	Zimbabwe Council of Churches

ABSTRACT

This research is designed to investigate the role and mission of the Church in response to the HIV and AIDS pandemic. A case study of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station has been used for the investigation of the research. The research focuses on women who are living with HIV and AIDS. A good number of African women theologians and scholars, as well as some male theologians, have explored the implications of HIV and AIDS. They have highlighted the impact of inequitable gender relations on women's vulnerability to HIV. This research is built on the evidence that has been exposed by the theologians in the area of HIV and AIDS. The research findings affirm and portray a reflection of the reality of suffering that is being encountered by women living with HIV and AIDS. Until appropriate measures are put in place to address the pandemic, the Church will always remain challenged to respond to the theological challenges presented by the HIV epidemic.

The research draws the attention of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station to the urgent need of responding to the devastating consequences of HIV and AIDS for women and their families. The study suggests three key biblical insights that should be a motive for the Church to be engaged in the pandemic. These are: the Exodus event that reveals the justice of God for the poor people; the mission of the prophets, a mission for the poor; and the mission of Jesus. Central to these key insights is the liberation of the poor and the oppressed.

The mission of the Church therefore cannot be understood outside God's mission *Missio Dei*, a mission that has the poor as its central focus. In this research, the Church is encouraged to redefine its mission by recognising the plight of the poor and creating situations that aim to eradicate the oppression of women, and provide empowerment opportunities that can transform their lives. Liberation Theology and Asset-Based Community Development are used as frameworks or tools that attempt to answer the research problem:

How can the Catholic Church of St Alois Rural Mission exercise its pastoral mission in addressing the challenges that are faced by women living with HIV and AIDS?

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

1.1 Background of the Research

This study attempts to make an examination of the mission of the Church in the era of HIV and AIDS. Its main focus is on rural women living with HIV and AIDS and therefore uses St. Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station as its case study.

St Alois is situated in Silobela District which is in the southern part of the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. The area is one of the most rural areas in the Province. The population in this area depends mainly on agriculture for a living. In times of drought, these people live at the mercy of the government or on well-wishers. However, from the year 2002 up to the present (2010), life has not been easy for many people in some parts of Zimbabwe. Hunger and poverty have been threatening the core being of people, many of whom are dying.

While an indisputable fact is that hunger and famine are generally understood to be mainly caused by drought, in the Zimbabwean situation, the link between the current crisis of hunger, poverty and politics is increasingly becoming more manifest because of the government's seizure of almost all productive farms formally owned by white commercial farmers. The seizure of commercial farms was done in the name of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP)¹, a move which triggered intense discussion both locally and internationally because of the manner in which it was implemented. The programme was politicized and carried out haphazardly. With so many farms disrupted, destroyed and left untended, the Zimbabwean people started to face serious food shortages to add to their list of woes.² The destruction of white commercial farms with no constructive measures put in place meant that even the grain storage depots, which used to stock many tons of food for the nation, especially in cases of drought, have since dried up. With the advent of the FTLRP, the

¹ Fast Track Land Reform Programme is a programme which was launched by the ZANU PF ruling government of Zimbabwe in 2000. Its stated aim was to take arable land from rich white commercial farmers for distribution to the poor and middle- income indigenous landless Zimbabweans.

² Martin Meredith. 2002. *Mugabe: Power, Plunder, and the Struggle for Zimbabwe*. Jeppesstown: Jonathan Ball

country began to experience a serious periodic shortage of basic consumer commodities. With all these problems, the consequences were obvious: hunger and poverty. In a discussion document prepared by the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC), Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), the implementation of FTLRP was criticised for being the major cause of the following:

The denudation of professionals and skilled personnel through a massive brain drain into the diaspora, hyper-inflation, widespread shortages of essential inputs and basic commodities, decline in agricultural and manufacturing productivity, shortages of foreign currency, escalating corruption, flight of foreign investments, rampant black marketeering in anything ranging from foreign currency to scarce commodities, declared and undeclared sanctions and dwindling tourist arrivals.³

According to the Churches, these problems impacted heavily on some marginalised groups. A comment in the same document says, “These are mainly people in communal and resettlement areas, and those belonging to vulnerable social groups, (HIV and AIDS) affected women, farm workers, etc.”⁴ These negative indicators have therefore inflicted a heavy toll on the population generally and the most affected were the rural folk, women especially.

As such, the current widespread hunger, malnutrition and poverty in the context of Zimbabwe is no doubt falling heavily on women, who in most cases are responsible for their dependent children, managing the home and taking care of all aspects of home life. The situation is even worse and desperate for those women living with HIV and AIDS. As stated by Rakoczy (2004), “It is women who care for their children who are infected or dying infants, teens and adults. It is often the grandmothers who care for all their grandchildren when their parents have died.”⁵ With the situation of food crisis in Zimbabwe today, those eligible for antiretroviral therapy are experiencing unbearable side effects because of taking the antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) on an empty stomach. According to the report by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on the condition of people living with HIV and AIDS, many people are unable to wait for the side effects to wear off and some are being forced to sell their monthly supply of medication to others, in exchange for money to buy food and other

Publishers, pg. 197.

³ The Zimbabwe We Want: Towards a National Vision for Zimbabwe. *A Discussion Document*: Sept, pg. 5.

⁴ The Zimbabwe We Want: pg. 32.

⁵ Susan Rakoczy, 2004. *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, pg. 125.

necessities.⁶ By the very nature of ARVs, users need to have an adequate food supply to counter the adverse side effects.

Other difficulties faced by women living with HIV and AIDS in the area of St Alois Mission include the affordability of drugs, availability of drugs in their rural area, access to health centres where drugs are available and also the unsteady supply of drugs. The whole situation continues to push women living with HIV and AIDS to the margins of the society. Hunger and poverty make life more unbearable for them as well.

In view of the above, the burden of women living with HIV and AIDS can well be understood as mainly a result of political oppression, corruption, exploitation and power abuse. To add to this, their burden cannot be understood outside the ideologies of the patriarchal system of the society that promotes gender inequality. Thus, differences in gender patterns within relationships between women and men place the majority of women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station in a vulnerable context. The current burden of poverty, hunger, HIV and AIDS comes as an additional problem to the women who are already oppressed and marginalised by the various social factors that are rooted in a patriarchal system.

The situation, therefore, has a systemic cause that cries out to be addressed. It is from this background that the Church is called to exercise the mission of God, which, if traced back to the history of salvation, can be seen particularly in the Exodus event where Yahweh is revealed as the God who listens to the cries of the oppressed Israelites. The theology of the mission of the Church therefore is derived from God's act of love for the poor and the oppressed.

In endeavouring to pursue this study therefore, the following question is pertinent:

How can the Catholic Church of St Alois Rural Mission exercise its pastoral mission in addressing the challenges that are faced by women living with HIV and AIDS?

⁶ <http://www.healthdev.org/viewmsg.aspx?msgid=982a3552-1044-4af9-99ea-d4c558463694> (Accessed on 17.04.2009).

1.2 Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to St Alois Rural Mission Station which is located in the southern part of the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. The aim of this study is not to elaborate on a complete meaning of the mission of the Church in the context of HIV and AIDS, but to focus and examine the mission of the Church in a particular given context. The study does not answer all issues and problems related to its nature and identity and will not delve too deeply into details about the politics of Zimbabwe. The main focus is on social-political aspects which are community based. In addition, the study is focused on a pastoral approach which is in the discipline of Ministerial Studies. Further limitations are that this research will focus on rural women living with HIV and AIDS, staying in the above-mentioned area. One of the major limitations is the scarcity of information about St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station as well as the communities around it. Hence, this makes it difficult to relate the mission of the Church in this case to what exactly is happening on the ground. Financial and time constraints also add to the limitations.

1.3 Hypothesis of the Study

This study is based on the hypothesis that St. Alois Rural Mission Station has a role to play in realising the full potential of women living with HIV and AIDS. My intention includes identifying an essential and practical methodological framework that will facilitate a deeper understanding of the mission of the Church in the context of women living with HIV and AIDS.

With the provided background, I intend to seek a contextual way forward through the Church of St. Alois - that aims at helping HIV and AIDS positive women to become liberated from their situation and to become self-sustaining.

1.4 Preliminary Literature Study

A great deal of academic research is available on the 'Mission of the Church'. Several theologians have produced a body of literature dealing with various aspects on the meaning of the Church in different situations. David Bosch for instance is one of the theologians who focuses on the mission of the Church.

His book *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*,⁷ provides a well-informed study of the theology of the mission of the Church. Bosch gives his opinions on different dimensions of mission and these dimensions try to convey God's concern for the entire world. Bosch's idea of paradigm shifts demonstrates the extent to which the understanding and practice of mission has changed during some centuries of Christian missionary history. A. J. Kirk, in his book: *What is Mission? Theological Explorations*⁸ also reflects on the underlying theology of God's mission. He exposes key aspects of contemporary mission, from the familiar to the unusual. Kirk attempts to present the crucial material on theology of mission in a convenient form. As such, he offers different opinions on the nature of the *Missio Dei* and the Church's relationship to it. The author tries to review what the Church might be, and do, if it were sufficiently conscious of its nature as a Church, for the sake of mission. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator has reflected on the role of the Church in his *From Crisis to Kairos: The Mission of the Church in the time of HIV/AIDS, Refugees and Poverty*.⁹ He sees the Church as a community that defines and fulfils its mission within the framework of society.

Similarly, a great number of works have also been published on the whole question of people living with HIV and AIDS. Musa W. Dube, an African woman theologian, is undoubtedly one of the leading voices on theology and the HIV and AIDS pandemic in Africa. She has edited a number of volumes on the HIV and AIDS pandemic. With Musimbi Kanyoro, Dube co-edited the volume, *Grant me Justice! HIV/AIDS and Gender Reading of the Bible*.¹⁰ The book is comprised of a variety of articles written by different African women theologians. It proposes gender-sensitive multi-sectional readings of the Bible in the light of HIV and AIDS. It proposes different ways and methods of re-reading the Bible. These ways attempt to fill the gaps that include the right to healing, care, human rights to all, life, medicine and treatment and other related areas. The book also challenges the social structures of poverty, injustice, gender, violence and other structures that are fertile grounds for the spread of HIV and AIDS.

⁷ David J. Bosch. 1991. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. New York: Orbis Books.

⁸ Andrew J. Kirk. 1999. *What is Mission? Theological Explorations*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, Ltd.

⁹ Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator. 2008. *From Crisis to Kairos: The Mission of the Church in the time of HIV/AIDS, Refugees and Poverty*. Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa.

¹⁰ Musa W. Dube and Musimbi Kanyoro, (eds). 2004. *Grant me Justice! HIV/AIDS and Gender Reading of the Bible* Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

Dube also contributed to the transformation of the Church's thinking on HIV and AIDS. Her journal article *Theological Challenges: proclaiming the Fullness of Life in the HIV and AIDS and Global Economic Era*¹¹ focuses on the meaning of the mission of the Church in the contemporary period. For Dube, mission in the era of HIV and AIDS implies the Church providing an effective and sustained response to the epidemic.¹² She views the mission of the Church to include wiping away tears from the faces of African women, integrating people with HIV and AIDS, and surrounding those affected by HIV and AIDS with love and compassion. According to Dube, mission entails being HIV and AIDS competent that is, being able to proclaim life amidst death. Dube's work on HIV and AIDS in the context of African theology, therefore, has been a point of reference for a number of theologians.¹³

There have also been other significant publications, especially by African women theologians within the context of theology. Teresia M. Hinga, Ann N. Kubai and Philomena N. Mwaura edited a book entitled *Women, Religion and HIV and AIDS in Africa: Responding to Ethical and Theological Challenges*.¹⁴ This is a compilation of different articles by women theologians. The articles provide a unique analytical contribution to the HIV and AIDS crisis and its implications for the women of Africa. Authors in this book do agree that the HIV and AIDS crisis is urgent, complex and life threatening to women in Africa. The scandal of stigma is highlighted as the major factor in the ethical challenge posed by HIV and AIDS. The authors also expose some of the deadly cultural, theological and scriptural roots of attitudes and practices that have compounded the crisis of HIV and AIDS in Africa, ultimately robbing millions of women of their dignity and lives. Isabel Phiri and Beverly Haddad have also edited a book entitled *African Women, HIV/AIDS, and Faith Communities*¹⁵ that is a collection of articles by African women theologians in an effort to call for concrete ways to confront the burden of HIV and AIDS on African women.

¹¹ Musa W. Dube. 2002a. *Theological Challenges: proclaiming the Fullness of Life in the HIV and AIDS and Global Economic Era*. *International Review of Mission* 88 (363), pp. 535-549.

¹² Ezra Chitando and Rosina Gabartse 2008. "Other Ways of Being a Divine-Healer: Musa, W. Dube and the African Church's Response to HIV and AIDS", in Ezra Chitando, (ed.), *Mainstreaming HIV and AIDS in Theological Education: Experiences and Explorations*, pg. 98.

¹³ See for example Ezra Chitando and Rosina Gabartse 2008. "Other Ways of Being a Divine" pp 85-101.

¹⁴ Teresia Hinga, Ann N. Kubai and Philomena N. Mwaura (eds). 2008. *Women, Religion and HIV and AIDS in Africa: Responding to Ethical and Theological Challenges*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

¹⁵ Isabel A. Phiri., Beverly Haddad., Masenya (eds). 2003. *African Women, HIV/AIDS, and Faith Communities*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

These women theologians are encouraging African women to seek ways of empowering themselves with knowledge to overcome situations that expose them to HIV and AIDS. Through the reading and studying of scriptures, African women theologians are demanding that women themselves be able to define womanhood. Traditional gender roles and power relations that contribute to the vulnerability of women and girls are challenged. In the same book, the Church is also challenged to practice justice and to side with the oppressed, especially women with HIV and AIDS.

Susan Rakoczy, an editor of a number of books and a publisher of the book *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology*¹⁶, is a woman theologian who, through her works, positions a woman figure in a state of equality. Her book presents an overview of the theological contributions of women around the world but mainly focusing on those of Africa. Rakoczy engages in gender equality as a key theme in her discussions. Her work is used as reference, especially by authors who seek to define the true meaning of God's justice toward all human beings. The book has therefore been one of the references in this research.

On the other hand, the politics of land in the current situation of Zimbabwe is viewed as having some negative effects on nation. Some works have also been published by a number of writers. These include G. Hunter, L. Farren, and A. Farren in their book *Voices of Zimbabwe. The Pain, the Courage, the Hope*.¹⁷ The authors of this book give a detailed account of Zimbabwe's economic and political situation shortly before and after independence, which was gained in 1980. They share the opinion that agriculture has always been the mainstay of the country's economy. The book was written in 2001, a time when the country was beginning to feel the tragic consequences of Fast Track Land Reform Programme. The authors, therefore, view the launching of FTLRP as the advent of the political, economic and social crisis. According to the authors, the programme was accompanied by the decline in agricultural and manufacturing productivity which later increased vulnerability and pushed more people further to the margins of the society, a reality which continues to surface up to the present day.

¹⁶ Susan Rakoczy. 2004. *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

¹⁷ Glyn Hunter, L. Farren, and A. Farren. 2001. *Voices of Zimbabwe. The Pain, the Courage, the Hope*. Johannesburg: Alfa (Pvt) Ltd.

Martin Meredith's *Robert Mugabe: Power, Plunder and Tyranny in Zimbabwe*¹⁸ is a book that compiles a fascinating and heartbreaking political story of what happened to Zimbabwe and to Mugabe, a leader who was once hailed around the world as a revolutionary hero. He explains the current political situation of Zimbabwe as characterised by lawlessness, violence, intimidations, murder, and so on. In this book, Meredith offers a cogent explanation for Mugabe's wilful destruction of his own country. The implementation of FTLRP was a major disaster to the country. The greatest impact of the programme was felt immediately upon its introduction. In his comment, Meredith says, "Zimbabwe has been reduced to a bankrupt and impoverished state, threatened by economic collapse and catastrophic food shortages."¹⁹ Similarly, Andrew Norman in his book *Mugabe: Teacher, Revolutionary, Tyrant*²⁰ outlines the political history of Zimbabwe since the time when the white settlers came to occupy the country. The question of FTLRP shapes the backbone of his book. As one of the most recent publications, Norman views the current deterioration of food security as the direct result of FTLRP. For him, the current issue of hunger and poverty in Zimbabwe cannot be understood outside the land question. In addition, he also states that even the gross human rights abuses by the government have been committed in the name of the land reform.

In the area of liberation theology, Leonard Boff and Clodovis Boff wrote a book *Introducing Liberation Theology*²¹ in the context of the situation of Latin America. It was during the time when the poor population of Latin America was living in absolute poverty, when a great deal of injustice and denial of human rights was the order of the day. The book then offers some strategies for helping the poor and the oppressed to change this oppressive social condition for the better. As such their model 'liberation theology' was written in an effort to try and raise the consciousness of people on the problem and to make them take part in redeeming themselves from the situation. From this explanation, women in the area of St Alois also need the same strategy of liberation. Similarly, Gustavo Gutierrez, the father of liberation theology, wrote *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*.²²

¹⁸ Meredith, M. 2002. *Robert Mugabe: Power, Plunder and Tyranny in Zimbabwe*: Cape Town: Jonathan Publishers.

¹⁹ Meredith, M, 2002, pg. 228.

²⁰ Andrew Norman, A. 2008. *Mugabe: Teacher, Revolutionary, Tyrant*. Gloucestershire: The History Press Ltd.

²¹ Leonard Boff and Clodovis Boff. 1987. *Introducing Liberation Theology*. Kent: Burns & Oates.

²² Gustavo Gutierrez. 1973. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*. New York: Orbis Books,

The book focuses on a theology that arises out of deep compassion and critical reflection on the situation of the poor and the oppressed. As such, Gutierrez's theology of liberation is based on the notion that God is the God of liberation of the oppressed. According to Gutierrez, "The God whom we know in the Bible is a liberating God, a God who destroys myths and alienations, a God who intervenes in history in order to break down the structures of injustices and who raises up prophets in order to point out the way of justice and mercy."²³

John Kretzman and John McKnight, in their book *Building a Community from Inside Out: a Path toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Asset*,²⁴ propose an approach called Asset Based Community Development (ABCD). This can be used as a tool to assist in setting up income generating projects in communities that are less advantaged. People have to start with the assets that are found in their particular community and also make use of the talents that they have as individuals. The approach is significant to this research especially during this time in Zimbabwe when even The World Food Programme (WFP) says it has to cut the ration to meet increased demand and cope with a shortfall in donations.²⁵ The implementation of ABCD in this context is a way of liberating women living with HIV and AIDS from dependency syndrome. R.C. Linthicum also wrote a book entitled *Empowering the Poor: Community Organising Among the City's "rag, tag and bobtail"*.²⁶ The book provides strategies by which pastors and local churches can share the gospel at the point of people's needs. The book offers an urban approach to Christian ministry among the poor. In bringing about empowerment to the poor people in cities, the author provides a framework called 'Community Organisation', a process by which people of an urban community organise themselves to deal with those essential forces that are exploiting their community and causing their powerlessness. The author uses the Church in implementing the programme. According to the approach, the Church should incarnate itself in a community, become flesh and bone of the people's bone and to respect those people, perceiving them as being people of great wisdom and potential.²⁷ Although the book uses an urban approach in dealing with the poor

Maryknoll.

²³ Gutierrez, G. 1973.

²⁴ John P. Kretzman and John L. McKnight. 1993. *Building a Community from Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Asset*. Chicago: ACTA Publications.

²⁵ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jan/29/zimbabwe-starving-food-aid-cut> (Accessed on 21.04.2009).

²⁶ Robert C. Linthicum. 1991. *Empowering the Poor: Community Organising among the City's "rag, tag and bobtail"*. California: MARC.

²⁷ Robert C. Linthicum. 1991, pg. 23.

communities, the process is equally helpful to this study and will also be used to address the situation under investigation.

A list of sources cited above, will be used to shape a theology that will help the Church of St Alois to fully exercise its pastoral mission for the poor, who in the context of this research are women living with HIV and AIDS.

The pastoral action of the Church in this context serves to liberate HIV and AIDS women from the current oppressive systems that hinder them from overcoming situations that expose their vulnerability. With such vast material covering these areas, this study does not duplicate any of the existing literature. It stands as a unique contribution to the existing body of knowledge in Ministerial Studies, focusing mainly on the pastoral mission of the Church in the context of women living with HIV and AIDS within the Zimbabwean context. The whole situation in the context of this research calls for a theology of liberation for women who are marginalized and excluded by the societal system because of their HIV and AIDS status. The following are some of the primary sources consulted by the researcher.

1.5 Reasons for Choosing the Topic

In view of the above consulted sources, we can see that much work has been published on the mission of the Church. Some books have demonstrated the challenges that the Church is facing in different crises. Some authors stress the fact that food insecurity and poverty make affected populations more vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. The above books are, to a great extent, relevant to this study because of the context in which they were written. Similarly, some consulted works provide the background to the political situation of Zimbabwe emphasizing the 2000 to 2009 Fast Track Land Reform Programme. The authors have a consensus on the negative impacts that accompanied FTLRP, some of which include hunger, poverty, unemployment and other related issues.

However, with the urgency of HIV and AIDS in our world today, little attention is given to *practical ways* to help people, especially those HIV positive people who are in poor and remote areas, to stand on their feet in an effort to be really self-sustaining. There are many written ideas, principles and insights on how the Church can exercise its mission around HIV

and AIDS issues. Conferences are attended on different areas that deal with HIV and AIDS and many of books on the issue of HIV and AIDS are published all the time. A great number of books on gender issues are also published. The publication of books is a sign that people are aware of the problems around our societies and therefore the researchers are trying to respond. However it should not be forgotten that in some parts of our world and particularly in Africa, we still have those places which are in the remotest areas where education is minimal, where people can neither read nor write. Besides social location and lack of education, many people do not have access to these books. To add to this, documents are always in danger of remaining only written texts. All this shows a gap that needs an extra mile in searching for practical approaches that can meet the social needs of people in remote locations. Similarly, humanitarian organisations including those responding to HIV and AIDS, mostly concentrate on the cities, leaving some rural communities to face almost near extinction.

It is for the above reasons that the researcher has decided to choose St Alois Rural Mission Station as a study area for this research. We will look at the research problem and objectives of this study.

1.6 Research Problem and Objectives

In order to answer the key question:

How can the Catholic Church of St Alois Rural Mission exercise its pastoral mission in addressing the challenges that are faced by women living with HIV and AIDS, the following sub-questions will be considered.

1.6.1 Sub Questions

1. Why is it important for St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station to engage in addressing the challenges that are faced by women living with HIV and AIDS?
2. How are women living with HIV and AIDS in St Alois Rural Catholic Mission coping with hunger and poverty in the present situation of Zimbabwe?

3. What can be suggested to help women living with HIV and AIDS to become more liberated and become self-sustaining in the existing harsh political and economic conditions of Zimbabwe?
4. How does the Catholic Church of St Alois Rural Mission understand its mission in the current Zimbabwean context?

1.6.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate ways in which St Alois Rural Mission Station can apply pastoral tools in its mission of care and support, to help rural women living with HIV and AIDS in those surrounding communities.
2. To establish a contextual approach or framework that can be used to help HIV positive women to become aware of what is happening in their lives, why it is happening and to help transform their own situation.
3. To engage the local Catholic Church of St Alois in the implementation of liberation theology and Asset Based Community Development as pastoral frameworks in transforming the lives of women living with HIV and AIDS.

1.7 Principal Theories upon which the Research Project will be Constructed (Research Design)

There are many suggestions as to how the poor can escape from the trap of poverty. These depend largely on how the causes are evaluated. In the perspective of this study, the whole question of hunger and poverty which has fallen heavily on women living with HIV and AIDS cannot be understood outside gender injustices and the destruction of productive white commercial farms. As such, the situation calls for a strategy that can help those people who were mostly affected to look for other ways of survival so that they can transform their situation.

In the context of this study therefore, Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff's model of 'liberation theology' appears to be more adequate, efficient and offers a practical framework for the situation of St Alois Mission where the women living with HIV and AIDS remain

dehumanised by the situation. According to the two authors, liberation theology was born when faith confronted the injustice done to the poor.²⁸

Apart from the Church's core business of preaching the Gospel, the primary mission of St Alois Rural Catholic Mission Station, according to the model of liberation theology, is to educate people, especially those who are poor and marginalized, and in this case, women living with HIV and AIDS, to become critically aware of the reasons for their poverty, as a starting point of liberation. In support of the importance of liberation theology, Mulholland asserts that people should be enabled to reflect on their own problems and to articulate their own perceptions of solutions to such problems. Indeed, people should be empowered to identify their own needs, mobilize their own resources and shape their own future.²⁹

While Boff's model of liberation theology will be used as the basic framework, it will be juxtaposed with a similar framework called Asset Based Community Development (ABCD). The ABCD framework was pioneered by John Kretzmann and John McKnight. As expressed by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), ABCD suggests that, "...communities cannot be rebuilt by focusing on their needs, problems, and deficiencies. Rather, community building starts with the process of locating the assets, skills and capacities of residents..."³⁰ The framework endeavours to shift people away from a dependent syndrome whereby everything is expected to come from the donor.

1.8 Research Methodology and Methods

The effectiveness of the frameworks is largely determined by the method and, or approach that will be used by the researcher. The approach in this study calls for a methodology which is community based. This entails procedures in collection of data from the study area. In view of this, the study used a qualitative research design. It is an empirical study which combined both unstructured interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). The study also included literature sources.

²⁸ Leonard Boff and Clodovis Boff. 1987, pg. 3.

²⁹ Mulholland, C. 1988. *Ecumenical Reflections on Political Economy*. Geneva: WCC Publications, pg. 5

³⁰ John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, J. 1993, pg. ii.

1.9 Study Population and Data Collection

The study used 24 participants from four parishes of St Alois Mission Station. The population was not limited to Catholic Christians only, but was open to any interested parties. Participants were divided into different groups from the four outstations of St Alois Rural Mission Station. The groups were interviewed at different times and places. The interviewees were important in data collection as their contribution was vital in influencing research plans and programming.

A meeting with a group of women who are living with HIV and AIDS was held in a convenient and private place which they had suggested. For privacy and confidentiality, these women were informed of the meeting with the researcher by their health or social community workers.

1.10 Research Instruments

In obtaining data from field work, at least two methods were used and these are: unstructured interviews and focus group discussions (FGD).

1.11 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters

Chapter One

The opening chapter provides the introduction of the research. This chapter provides the background of the research, its significance and the objectives. It briefly explains the research design and the methodologies that are used in the research.

Chapter Two

Chapter two outlines the situation of women in the context of HIV and AIDS. The chapter mainly focuses on the factors that make women most vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. These include gender inequality, cultural and religious beliefs, violence against women and other related factors. Examples are cited from the area of St Alois Rural Catholic Mission Station. A brief gender analysis as a way forward, is therefore discussed in the chapter.

Chapter Three

Chapter three outlines and describes the implementation of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme. The chapter then discusses how the programme has negatively affected the people of Zimbabwe and particularly women living with HIV and AIDS. The chapter exposes the link between politics and vulnerability of women in the context of the research.

Chapter Four

Chapter four focuses on data analysis. Findings of the study are reported in detail and analysed in the form of interaction between the literature review and research findings. Some testimonies from focus group discussions are written down and an analysis of each testimony is provided.

Chapter Five

Chapter five provides the mission of the Church as a response to women living with HIV and AIDS. It gives a theological motivation for the Church of St Alois, basing its argument from a biblical perspective. The chapter offers a clarification on the meaning of the mission of the Church in this era of HIV and AIDS

Chapter Six

Chapter six provides a detailed framework of the research which is described as a possible strategy for transforming the status of women living with HIV and AIDS in the area of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station. The chapter offers some suggestions on how the frameworks can be implemented.

Chapter Seven

Chapter seven offers the summary and conclusion of the whole paper.

CHAPTER TWO

WOMEN AND HIV AND AIDS

2.1 Introduction

The magnitude and impact of HIV and AIDS continues to remain a complex issue throughout many African countries. Women in general, and particularly those in Africa, have common significant experiences around the issue of HIV and AIDS. Women are more vulnerable to HIV and AIDS than men. To this, Pillay (2009) writes,

HIV and AIDS impacts on all of humanity. However, while HIV and AIDS may be described as an “equal opportunity” disease, the socio-cultural, economic and sex vulnerability of many women and girl-children are the main reasons for the increase in infection amongst women.³¹

This chapter focuses mainly on some of the factors that expose women to HIV and AIDS. It highlights how gender inequalities in different aspects of life render women vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. This will include some of the factors that are mainly responsible for the spread of HIV infection to women. However, the chapter will not exhaust all the factors that expose women to HIV vulnerability, but will discuss those that are more relevant to the situation of the women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station. Therefore the discussion will include gender inequality, patriarchy, culture and religion, stigma and discrimination, silence and then domestic violence. From a theological point of view, it will also be imperative for me to briefly discuss the position of women in earlier times, starting from a historical perspective and focusing on how women were viewed in some societies. The chapter will end by briefly discussing how the life of women living with HIV and AIDS can be improved.

2.2 Women’s Vulnerability to HIV and AIDS

According to the research findings done by World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), “Initially, HIV and AIDS was viewed as a disease mostly affecting men. In recent years it has been found that it is affecting women at faster rates than men in some regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa, where the gap is narrowed between the male and female populations infected

³¹ Miranda Pillay 2009. “Women in the Church: Toward Developing Community in the Context of HIV and AIDS”, in Ezra Chitando and Nonthando Hadebe (eds) *Compassionate Circles: African Women Theologians*

by HIV.”³² Indeed, this concurs with Momsen (2004) who says, “Women are biologically more susceptible to infection and some empirical evidence shows the rate of transmission from male to female to be two to five times higher than from female to male.”³³ From the above quote, we can see that women are more at risk in contracting HIV and AIDS than men. According to Farley’s (2004) explanation, women’s vulnerability to HIV and AIDS is a result of a combination of factors that include greater anatomical and physiological vulnerability, cultural practices, gender violence, lack of economic resources and others.³⁴

To stress the point, Chitando (2007) asserts that, “A cocktail of biological, cultural and socio-economic factors contribute to women’s greater vulnerability to HIV.”³⁵ Similarly, Rakoczy (2004) affirms that women are “overwhelmingly more at risk in this crisis because of their anatomy, the epidemic of sexual violence against women, and the lack of gender equality in sexual relationships.”³⁶ Similarly, Chitando (2007) outlines several factors that exacerbate women’s vulnerability to HIV and AIDS in the following statement:

Socioeconomic factors, including women’s lack of access to education or personal income and unequal property rights perpetuate women’s greater vulnerability to HIV infection. Many women fear their husbands or partners will abandon them if they try to control how and when they have sex and whether their partner uses a condom. Moreover, poverty drives some women into the sex industry, where sexual trafficking and commercial sex promote continued exposure to HIV. Furthermore, men control the main tool for reducing the risk of sexual transmission of HIV: the male condom. Even though the female condom has improved prevention options for women, men’s involvement is still crucial.³⁷

The above explanation clearly indicates how women’s chances to contract HIV and AIDS are high. Having ascertained the fact that women are more vulnerable to the HIV and AIDS infection, as clearly outlined by a number of authors, we can therefore classify HIV and AIDS as a gendered epidemic which is complex and more life threatening to women than

Facing HIV. Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, pg. 103.

³² World Alliance of Reformed Churches Researches. 2003. *Created in the Image of God: From Hierarchy to Partnership*. Switzerland: WARC, pg. 63.

³³ Janet H. Momsen. 2004. *Gender and Development*. London: Taylor and Francis Group, pg. 84.

³⁴ Margaret A. Farley. 2004. “Partnership in Hope: Gender, Faith, and Responses to HIV/AIDS in Africa”. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 20/1, pg. 133-148.

³⁵ Ezra Chitando. 2007. *Acting in Hope: African Churches and HIV/AIDS 2*. Geneva: WCC Publications., pg. 6.

³⁶ Susan Rakoczy. 2004. *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology*, pg. 125.

³⁷ Chitando, E. 2007, pg. 6.

men. In this respect, the issue of gender becomes central in the understanding of HIV and AIDS. As such, efforts to stem the tide of the HIV epidemic can only be successful if we understand each of the concrete factors that make it spread fast.

2.3 Factors Responsible for the Spread of HIV and AIDS in Women

There are quite a number of factors that expose women to HIV and AIDS. We shall not discuss all of them but will mainly focus on those that are relevant to the context of this study, that is, women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station who are living with HIV and AIDS. These factors, as we shall see, mainly stem from gender relations which are mostly constructed from cultural and religious beliefs which are patriarchal in nature. The following section seeks to address those factors that influence women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS.

2.3.1 Gender Inequality

In recent years, there is a tendency amongst many scholars and activists to reduce gender to women's issues. As argued by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), "The concept of gender, despite its growing usage, remains largely misunderstood. It tends to be mistakenly associated as another word for woman and is often limited to describing the biological definition of being woman."³⁸ Seemingly, King (1995) argues that at present, gender studies are still mainly focused on women because women have been voiceless for so long.³⁹ It is for these reasons, therefore, that some men argue that they have nothing to do with gender issues and as such, they are resistant to gender and so create discrepancies between women and men in every aspect of life. This understanding also forms the basis of the unequal treatment of women by men. A clear definition of gender is provided by Togarasei and Chitando (2008) as they say,

In fact, gender is not confined to women's issues. Gender refers to culturally constructed differentiation between men and women in terms of expected social roles. It refers to how individuals are brought up to act as men and women. In other words, while one's sexual identity as a male or female is a biological fact, how one expresses one's masculinity or femininity is shaped by societal values and norms.⁴⁰

³⁸ World Alliance of Reformed Churches Researches. 2003, pg. 63.

³⁹ Ursula King. 1995. "Introduction: Gender and the Study of Religion", in King, U. (ed). *Religion and Gender*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, pg. 1.

⁴⁰ Lovemore Togarasei and Ezra Chitando. 2008. "Teaching Religion and Gender in Contexts of HIV and

Gender therefore includes both women and men and yet it is misunderstood to a great degree. Defined by the Churches of Zimbabwe in the 'Discussion Document' (2006), gender is "the expectations and norms within a society with regard to appropriate male and female behaviour and roles, which attribute to men and women different access to status and power, including resources and decision-making power."⁴¹

This definition already shows the different roles between women and men. Thus, the roles and expectations assigned to women and men are reinforced and promoted by deep-seated societal biases and misperceptions. Dube (2003) describes gender roles as she asserts that men are considered as public leaders, thinkers, decision-makers and property owners while women are constructed primarily as domestic beings, who belong to the home or in the kitchen.⁴² The same view is shared by the WARC in a statement,

Women's primary roles include taking care of household needs - from energy needs, to food processing, cooking, nurturing children and caring for elders. These roles are largely under-valued and under-recognised. In addition, customs, beliefs and practices in many parts of the world prohibit women's access to resources such as education, loans and credit, thus limiting their participation in the public sphere. In other words, women are prohibited from holding leadership and decision-making positions within religious institutions because customs and traditions consider them to be unclean.⁴³

The negative implications of gender imbalances have not spared women in the area of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station. Like many other African women, they are disadvantaged through socialisation processes that promote men as physically powerful and fearless. Therefore, gender inequality can well be viewed as having its roots in the patriarchal organisation of most African societies where patriarchy engenders a culture of male domination and female subordination. Generally, this implies that women's inequality far outweighs that of men in both the private and public spheres of society, and this inequality makes them vulnerable in every respect. The construction of gender, therefore, has created a hierarchy that places men on the top ladder while women are placed on the lowest level. As

AIDS in Africa", in Ezra Chitando (ed), *Mainstreaming HIV and AIDS in the Theological Education: Experiences and Explorations*. Geneva: WCC Publications, pg. 214.

⁴¹ The Zimbabwe We Want: 2006, pg. 19.

⁴² Musa W. Dube. (ed) 2003. "Culture, Gender and HIV/AIDS: Understanding and Acting on the Issues", in Musa W. Dube, *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*, pg. 87.

⁴³ World Alliance of Reformed Churches Researches. 2003, pg. 64.

such, men have become dominant in their relationships with women. Dube (2003) provides a summary of how African societies have constructed gender. She says,

Women are mothers, wives, dependent on property of their husbands, brothers or fathers. Women are constructed to be silent, non-intelligent, emotional, well behaved, non-questioning, obedient and faithful to one man-husband, boyfriend or live-in partner. And so we think of a good woman as one who takes good care of her home, children, husband, who hardly questions or speaks back to her partner, and who remains faithful to him. A good man is one who is fearless, brave, a property-owner, a public leader and, in some cultures, he may have more than one partner.⁴⁴

The above attitudes have been internalised so strictly that many people in many African cultures think that gender is natural and therefore cannot be deconstructed. It is for this reason that the women of St. Alois, like many other women in African societies, are at the margins of the society and also more at risk to HIV and AIDS.

Gender Inequality in the Era of HIV and AIDS

In this era of HIV and AIDS, and in view of the existing inequalities between women and men, it is easy therefore, to identify who is more vulnerable to HIV and AIDS and why. In trying to explain why gender has been a major driving force behind the spread of HIV and AIDS, I find Gupta's explanation of gender useful. She says,

There is always a distinct difference between women and men's roles, access to produce productive resources outside the home and decision-making authority. Typically, men are seen as being responsible for the responsible for reproductive and productive activities within home...women have less access over control of productive resources than men – resources such as income, land credit, and education.⁴⁵

Apart from being more vulnerable, as mentioned earlier, women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station bear the responsibility of providing care to people living with HIV and AIDS. With the advent of home-based care, we see some of these women on the frontline of caring for HIV family members. Hence, chances to contract HIV and AIDS becomes high because women do this job without protective measures. Gender inequality, therefore, is one of the factors that are identified as the major driving force behind the spread of HIV and

⁴⁴ Musa W. Dube. (ed) 2003, pg. 87.

⁴⁵ Geeta Rao Guitar. 2000. *Gender, Sexuality and HIV/AIDS: The What, the Why and the How*, plenary address, 13th international AIS conference, Durban, South Africa, pg 1-8, www.icrw.org.

AIDS. It is because of the construction of gender roles that many people have been led into thinking that men should always dominate women even in sexual life.

In the situation of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station, there are also large social and economic gaps between women and men and these inequalities have played a central role in the spread of HIV infection. Chirongoma (2006) argues, “Pervasive gender inequality, poverty and the violation of women’s rights is propelling the spread of HIV and AIDS among the women of Zimbabwe. Traditional practices and violence affect their ability to enjoy a healthy, safe and stress-free existence”.⁴⁶ The sad part of it is the fact that the deafening silence regarding the vulnerability of women in many African societies continue to remain an issue of debate. The increase of women’s vulnerability continues to challenge the Churches and societies. As such, Dube calls upon theologians and other stakeholders to be actively involved in transforming culture and gender. She challenges people in the following words:

Any theologian, lecturer, leader or worker who lives in the human-rights era – who believes in democracy, and wants to contribute positively to the fight against HIV/AIDS, which is turning our dark-peopled continent into a red fire-inflamed continent of death – must not only seek to understand fully how it fuels the spread of HIV/AIDS, but also to change gender construction so that it empowers men and women. It is up to the society to be instrumental in change and transformation. The present set up benefits no one – men or women.⁴⁷

In the next section, we discuss the impact of patriarchy on gender relations and how it exacerbates women’s vulnerability to HIV and AIDS.

2.3.2 Patriarchy

Globally, not all women are the same but they have common experiences due to the gendered nature of human societies. Cultures, for instance, have constructed differences between men and women. From what has already been said earlier, the oppression and the undermining of women’s dignity can be traced from the Jewish patriarchal society. Patriarchy therefore, can be considered as another influential factor that contributes to HIV infection on women.

⁴⁶ Sophie Chirongoma. 2006. “Women’s and Children’s Rights in the time of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe: An Analysis of Gender Inequalities and its Impact on People’s Health”. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 126/2, pg. 48-65.

⁴⁷ Musa W. Dube. 2003, pg. 85.

Rich (1976) defines patriarchy as

... the power of the fathers: familial-social, ideological, political system which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.⁴⁸

Clifford (2005) further illustrates, that patriarchy functions as an ideology that affects every aspect of societal life. In patriarchal societies, the status of women and children is one of inferiority.⁴⁹

From these definitions, we can note that patriarchy is all about control and dominance. Patriarchy has socialised men to use power and control over women and this attitude has made women vulnerable to men's abuse. In a patriarchal society, women are construed as powerless and even as far less than human beings. It cannot be doubted therefore, that patriarchy is a system that is responsible for shaping and promoting gender inequality. As such, we can view it as the prime reason for the prevailing gender inequalities. The powerlessness, the oppression, and the unjust treatment of women cannot be explained outside the realm of gender inequality. More so, the problem of gender inequality cannot be understood outside the patriarchal world where women are treated as less than human beings. Patriarchy therefore has exposed women to a life of vulnerability and it has had a negative impact on women's dignity. Tracing the roots of patriarchy, Moltmann in Tappa (1986) explains, "Patriarchy is a very ancient and widespread system of male domination. Christianity proved incapable of successfully opposing this system. Indeed, quite early on, Christianity was already taken over by men and made to serve patriarchy."⁵⁰ Messer (2004) concurs,

Christianity and other world religions developed amid patriarchal societies in which women are treated as objects rather than persons. To this day, women have neither been accorded equal rights within the society nor equal rights within religious communities. The male, in most instances, has been granted authority and power over

⁴⁸ Rich, A. 1976. *Of Woman Born*. New York: WW Norton, pg. 57.

⁴⁹ Anne M. Clifford. 2005. *Introducing Feminist Theology*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, pg.18.

⁵⁰ Louise Tappa. 1986. "God in Man's Image", in J.Pobee and Barbel von Waternberg-Potter, (eds), *New Eyes for Reading: Biblical and Theological Reflections by Women from the Third World*. Geneva: WCC Publications, pg. 101.

women, especially wives, and this has led to devastating consequences for women and their health and well-being. Women for example, have far little control or autonomy over their sexual lives and are often forced to submit to the erotic wishes and whims of men. This behaviour has often been overtly endorsed by the theologies that proclaim the husband as the 'head' of the family and relegate women to secondary roles within the church and culture.⁵¹

These definitions back up the fact that Christianity proved incapable of challenging patriarchal structures.

Like many other African societies, Zimbabwe is a patriarchal society where the male is regarded as the ruler and sovereign in the home and in public life. Patriarchy therefore, is dominant in the life of the people. As such, women, particularly in the area of St Alois Rural Mission Station, have not been spared from the mentality of the patriarchal system of male dominance. The control of women's sexuality by men is one of the major tenets of patriarchy. However, patriarchy may be positive if not abused. It may be of help in the running of family or community affairs if the male leadership treats women justly and views them as equally important.

Apart from gender inequality and patriarchy as factors leading to women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS, women are also facing the challenges of culture and religion as underlying causes that contribute to the spread of HIV and AIDS.

2.3.3. Culture and Religion

Kanyoro, (2002b) states that in the African indigenous thought system, culture and religion are not distinct from each other. Therefore, culture and religion embrace all areas of one's total life.⁵² This implies that when we want to try to understand gender, we first of all need to know that cultural and religious beliefs are the ones that give a stamp of approval to what is certainly a social construct. Indeed, culture and religion help to shape the meaning of gender and the two aspects help to maintain gender inequality because some of the abuse will be perpetrated in the name of culture and religion.

⁵¹ Messer, D. 2004. *Breaking the Conspiracy of Silence: Christian Churches and the Global AIDS Crisis*. Minneapolis: MN Fortress Press, pg. 78.

⁵² Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro 2002b. "Engendered Communal Theology: Women's Contribution to Theology in the 21st Century", in N. J. Njoroge and M.W. Dube (eds), *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African Women*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, pg. 158.

In her evaluation of culture, Kanyoro (2002a) says, “Culture is double-edged sword. In some instances, culture is like the creed for the community identity. In other instances, culture is the main justification for difference, oppression and injustice.⁵³ This explains therefore that even in the time of HIV and AIDS, there are some cultural practices within indigenous religions that expose women to the possibility of HIV infection.

An informal discussion with the elderly people in one of the local communities of St Alois Mission on issues of culture and religion, shows that many Shona people within the area are still rooted in cultural and traditional practices, and they try to maintain culture as best they can. According to the discussion, it reveals that up to the present day, some women in the area of St Alois are forced into widow inheritance where an older or younger brother of the deceased husband takes over the widow as his wife. This is said to take place as a way of ensuring the care and support of the widow as well as for the children of the deceased.⁵⁴ This confirms that women are totally dependent on men and therefore cannot raise children without the help of a male figure. Widow inheritance therefore means that if the man who inherits the widow was already married, he will end up having two wives. Yet in this era of HIV, having multiple sexual partners can fuel the infection rate, especially if one of the partners is already infected.

Another cultural practice which is still common is the practice of polygamy. In many patriarchal cultures, a man is allowed to have more than one wife. African women theologians criticise polygamy, arguing that if a husband is infected, he exposes all his wives to HIV. The phenomenon of ‘small houses’⁵⁵ where married men have girlfriends is another version of polygamy. It too exposes women to HIV infection because on one hand, the girlfriend who is financially dependent on the sexual partner has limited opportunities of negotiating for safer sex. On the other hand, the official wife might either be unaware of the fact that her husband is having extra-marital relations and would therefore not feel any need for safer sex, or even if she is aware of it, she has no right or power to determine when and how sex with her husband is done.⁵⁶ This practice is still common in the area of St Alois

⁵³ Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro.2002a. *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, pg. 13.

⁵⁴ Informal Discussion with the elderly individuals in the area of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station.

⁵⁵ ‘Small house’ is term commonly used by Zimbabweans denoting informal, extra-marital relations.

⁵⁶ Ezra Chitando. 2007, pg. 15.

Catholic Rural Mission Station. Small houses continue to feature in some marriages. Polygamy is practised by some individual families.

All these practices are undertaken in the name of culture and women cannot challenge such negative cultural practices simply because 'it is culture'. As pointed out by Lutanga (2005), "Culture calls for women to be silent about their pain, especially if speaking out will reveal the bad secrets about the family."⁵⁷ This observation is supported by Chirongoma (2006) when she emphasises the issue of culture and silence. She says, "The Shona culture is guided by proverbs that emphasize the significance of family secrets such that even when the husband is brutally violent; the wife has to bear it."⁵⁸ One of the most common of such proverbs is *Nhumbu mukadzi mukuru, hairavi chayadya* literally "the stomach is like an elderly woman, it does not reveal to anyone whatever it has swallowed", whether sweet or bitter, so a woman should never reveal whatever good or bad she encounters in her marriage. Most of the proverbs that were meant to keep family secrets were treated as part of culture. From the way it all looks, these proverbs were meant to be observed mostly by women, while giving men the authority to abuse women or their own wives in the name of culture.

However, it should also be argued that not all cultures are bad. Waliggo (2006) is one of those theologians who defend the integrity of African culture. In reference to HIV and AIDS, he contends that:

There are many genuine African values and practises that could be used in response to HIV and epidemic and argues that these include Africa's concern with life, family value of educating children in the appreciation and proper use of their sexuality, community values of one another, the medical and healing values and the spiritual-religious values that focus on God's power.⁵⁹

This means that while culture may generally be viewed as a tool that is used to oppress women, the same culture can also be used to deal positively with HIV and AIDS issues. This can therefore, be a consolation especially to those women whose life is exposed to HIV and AIDS.

⁵⁷ Shaba Lutanga. 2005. *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*. Harare: Sable Press (Pvt Ltd), pg. 75.

⁵⁸ Sophie Chirongoma. 2006. 126/2, pg. 48-65.

⁵⁹ John Mary Waliggo. 2005. "Inculturation and the HIV/AIDS Pandemic in the AMECEA Region", *African Ecclesial Review*, 47 (4), and 48 (1), pg. 294.

Having discussed gender inequality, patriarchy, culture and religion as some of the influential factors in the spread of HIV and AIDS to women, silence and sexuality cannot be ignored for their contribution to HIV infection on women. Let us then see how they fuel HIV and AIDS.

2.3.4 Silence and Sexuality

Issues around sexuality, as stated by Ayanga (2008), have always been considered immodest to talk about in public.⁶⁰ Kebaabetswe (2002) agrees with this observation by asserting that, “In most African countries, open discussion of sexuality is socially discouraged, especially between adults and youth, except during traditional rites of passage conducted by non-parental adults”.⁶¹ Naturally, this also applies to women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station. In the sexual domain, they are traditionally construed to be passive. Just as observed by Khathide (2003), “We often find that when we talk about sex in public, we are faced with comments like, ‘Don’t talk about sex, we are Christians’ or ‘Don’t talk about sex we are Africans’.”⁶² This implies the suppression of sex issues even in situations where it may be crucial to discuss them. However, women are the most affected group when it comes to silence on issues of sexuality. They are abused and forced into accepting what they do not enjoy and to pretend as if all sex is enjoyable to them.

Women’s sexual life secrets are therefore common in many African societies. As stated by Women’s NGO Coalition (2005), “Women’s sexuality is determined by the socio-cultural norms which deny women control over their own sexuality. Women are not expected to refuse the sexual advances of their male partners.”⁶³ Likewise, as observed by WARC (2003), “A wife cannot abstain from sex because when her husband demands it and she is powerless to negotiate. She cannot ask him to wear a condom because she is expected to be submissive and passive.”⁶⁴ Gabaitse (2008) advances this observation by saying, “Their

⁶⁰ Hazel Ayanga. 2008b. “Religio-Cultural Challenges in Women’s Fight against HIV and AIDS IN Africa”, in T.M. Hinga, P. Kubai, and H. Ayanga (Eds). *Women, Religion and HIV/AIDS in Africa: Responding to Ethical and Theological Challenges*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, pg. 41.

⁶¹ Paolo Kebaabetswe and Kathleen F. Noor. 2002. “Behavioural Change: Goals and Means”, in M. Essex et al. (eds). *AIDS in Africa*. New York: Kluwer Academic, pg. 519.

⁶² Agrippa G. Khathide. 2003. “Teaching and Talking about Our Sexuality: A Means to Combating HIV/AIDS”, in M.W. Dube (ed). *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*. Geneva:WCC Publications, pg. 86.

⁶³ Women’s NGO Coalition and SARDC WIDSAA. 2005. *Beyond Inequalities: Women in Botswana*. WINGOC/SARC, Gaborone and Harare., pg. 25.

⁶⁴ World Alliance of Reformed Churches Researches. 2003., pg. 137.

productive powers do not belong to them, they belong to their partners who decide whether the couple uses a condom or not.”⁶⁵ In the light of the above citation, we can see that the rules governing sexuality are male-defined, hence more demanding on the female than the male. Ayanga (2008) notes that women are expected to observe the rules of sexuality, and failure to do so leads to stigmatisation or becoming ostracised from society.⁶⁶ In this regard, if a wife refuses to observe the rules of sexuality, she is most likely to get a penalty of enduring domestic violence or can even get divorced.

In this era of HIV and AIDS, the implications of such a status quo are, therefore, that women often remain silent and continue to suffer even in the face of abusive sexual relationships because their culture on sexual issues expects them to endure all difficulties. A Shona proverb explains such endurances. It says, *chakafukidza dzimba matenga*, literally “a real modest woman will not reveal whatever is happening in her household even if it means physical, sexual or emotional abuse.”⁶⁷ As a result, the culture of silence and submissiveness means that women often do not avail themselves of help and treatment, particularly for sexually transmitted infections related to HIV and AIDS, for fear of stigmatisation and condemnation.⁶⁸

What this implies is that women are not able to discuss safer sex with their partners and as a result, they are obviously vulnerable to HIV infection. As explained by Chitando (2008b), “At any rate, women often do not have the power to negotiate safer sexual practices such as using condoms. In most instances, it is men who decide when, where and how the sexual act takes place.”⁶⁹

The above statements affirm the reality of the oppression of women, especially on issues of sexuality. Simply because they are women, they must therefore be vulnerable and submissive

⁶⁵ Rosinah Gabartse. 2008. “Searching for Contextual Relevance: The Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Botswana’s Response to HIV and AIDS”, in E. Chitando, *Mainstreaming HIV and AIDS in Theological Education: Experiences and Explorations*. Geneva: WCC Publications., pg. 44.

⁶⁶ Hazel Ayanga. 2008. “Religio-Cultural Challenges in Women’s Fight against HIV and AIDS IN Africa”, in Teresia Hinga et al (eds). *Women, Religion and HIV/AIDS in Africa: Responding to Ethical and Theological Challenges.*, pg. 39.

⁶⁷ Sophie Chirongoma. 2006. 126/2, pg. 48-65.

⁶⁸ Hazel Ayanga. 2008, pg. 41.

⁶⁹ Ezra Chitando. 2008b. “Disclosing Layers of Secrecy: Studying African Indigenous Religions in Contexts of HIV and AIDS”, in Ezra Chitando (ed), *Mainstreaming HIV AND AIDS in the Theological Education: Experiencing and Exploration*, pg. 180.

in everything. Women who insist on using condoms for instance are subjected to violence and are thought to be promiscuous.⁷⁰ Thus, women continue to suffer and die in silence because society expects them not to speak or complain about their situations. Women whose husbands are engaged in unsafe sexual practices have high chances of becoming vulnerable and contracting the virus.

All this explanation goes back to the gender problem. It is the construction of gender that has given husbands the freedom to demand sex from their wives whenever they feel like it, while wives are expected to be always available to satisfy the sexual desires of their husbands. In most cases, husbands engage in unsafe extramarital sexual practices and in the event that a husband gets infected, the wife will highly likely get infected, as highlighted by Haddad (2003). She says that, after testing positive, some women become afraid to disclose their status because they are often blamed by their partners for being infected. Some women are afraid to disclose the information because they are afraid to be discriminated against by their own families.⁷¹ The situation of women therefore, is desperate. They suffer silently for what they are not responsible. This explains how their life is in a dilemma as regards to HIV and AIDS.

In Ruether's words in Tappa, "Sociologically, women are a caste within every class and race. As women, they share a common condition of dependence, secondary existence, domestic labour, sexual exploitation, and the projection of their role in procreation into a total definition of their existence."⁷² This also means that a number of women are experiencing a difficult life due to the structures that exist in different classes and races. Refusal to abide with the oppressive structures, even within marriage life, frequently leads to domestic violence.

⁷⁰ Rosinah Gabartse. 2008. pg. 44.

⁷¹ Beverly Haddad. 2003. "Choosing to Remain Silent: Links Between Gender Violence, HIV/AIDS and the South African Church" in Isabel Phiri, Beverly Haddad and Madiopoane Masenya (eds), *African Women, HIV/AIDS and Faith Communities*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, pg. 152.

⁷² Louise Tappa. 1986. "God in Man's Image," in John Pobee and Barbel von Wartenberg-Potter" (eds), *New Eyes for Reading: Biblical and Theological Reflections by Women from the Third World*. Geneva: WCC Publications, pg. 103.

2.3.5 Domestic Violence

Like many other African women in other parts of Africa, women of St Alois, both married and unmarried, suffer all sorts of gender based domestic violence in their homes. Phiri (2000) argues that this form of gender-based violence is common even in the so-called 'Christian homes'. She says,

It occurs in various forms like battery, sexual abuse of female children and workers, female circumcision, dowry-related violence, marital rape, emotional, verbal, psychological, economic and spiritual abuse. Women, regardless of status, are affected by it.⁷³

This finds support in the findings by the Theological Advisory Commission. It says, "Domestic violence can take the form of a physical violence (hitting, beating, knocking down, or kicking) or be inflicted through verbal and psychological abuse."⁷⁴ In the era of HIV and AIDS, therefore, this affirms that women are becoming more exposed to domestic violence. Most of the reasons rest on the basis that women should not challenge or oppose men on issues of sex abuse, on oppressive cultures, or on any issues that force them into vulnerability. If a wife discovers that she is HIV positive, she cannot disclose the information to her husband, as this will certainly lead to abuse in different forms that may include beatings. An example is given by Haddad (2003) when she says,

Women whose husbands are engaged in unsafe sexual practices are particularly vulnerable to contracting the virus. After testing positive, there is great fear of disclosure of their status, as women are often blamed by their partners for being infected. There is evidence to suggest that women experience abuse after disclosure.⁷⁵

Domestic violence, therefore, makes life unbearable to women who express their concerns especially in the area of sexuality. For the sake of peace, it means that they will have to remain silent in the face of marital injustice.

⁷³ Isabel A. Phiri 2000. "Domestic Violence in Christian Homes. A Durban Case Study" in *Journal of Constructive Theology*. (85-110) December Vol. 6, No. 2, pg. 85.

⁷⁴ Theological Advisory Commission. 2000. "Sexual Violence in South Africa: A Search into its Causes", in Susan Rakoczy (ed). *Silent No Longer: The Church's Responds to Sexual Violence*. Pietermaritzburg: Natal Witness Printing and Publishing Company, pg. 10.

⁷⁵ Beverly Haddad. 2003. pg. 152.

2.3.6 Stigma and Discrimination

Tracing back through the history of humanity, we can see that stigma is a strong social label which has its roots in the Greek world. This is explained by Page (1984) when he says,

Stigma dates back to the Greek word for “tattoo-mark,” which was a brand made with a hot iron and impressed on people to show that they were devoted to the services of the temple or, on the opposite spectrum of behaviour, that they were criminals or runaway slaves. These marks were used somehow to expose infamy or disgrace of people who had sinned against society and God.⁷⁶

Thus, in our present day and in this era of HIV and AIDS, stigma is more associated with the opposite spectrum of behaviour. Luchetta (1999) defines stigma, “as a mark or brand of shame that has been elaborated by social scientists to refer to the social label conferred upon individuals or groups by virtue of their possession of a characteristic indicative of a deviant condition.”⁷⁷

Due to the fact that St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station is situated in the heart of the rural areas, education in HIV and AIDS has not fully reached the people in this community. Schools are trying their best to teach children about HIV and AIDS, but that is not enough, because the most affected and infected are the parents. The understanding of HIV and AIDS among the adults in this community remains an issue of concern. Because HIV and AIDS is closely related to sexuality, most people would not want to talk about it in public. Because of the lack of correct information about HIV and AIDS, the majority of people in the area of St Alois are still at the stage of believing that HIV and AIDS is a divine punishment for immoral behaviour. This implies that those infected will not come out publicly to say that they are infected. Instead, they keep their status secret for fear of stigmatisation and discrimination by the community. Chitando (2008b) argues that stigma also follows the fault-line of gender inequality. He goes on to explain that in most parts of Southern Africa, sexually transmitted infections are referred to as “women’s diseases”.⁷⁸ Thus women who are infected with HIV are often viewed as promiscuous and they are really discriminated against.⁷⁹ If women are

⁷⁶ Robert, M. Page. 1984. *Stigma*. London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, pg. 2.

⁷⁷ Tracy Luchetta. 1999. Relationships between Homophobia, HIV/AIDS Stigma, and HIV/AIDS Knowledge, in L. Pardie and T. Luchetta (eds), *The Construction of Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men*. Binghamton: Haworth Press., pg. 17.

⁷⁸ Ezra Chitando. 2008b. pg. 182.

⁷⁹ Ezra Chitando. 2008b, pg. 182.

open about their HIV status, they are likely to be the talk of the village or even the church community. Hence, women or other people infected by HIV would prefer to keep it secret.

Therefore stigma prevents any efforts that are designed to stem the tide of the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Denis (2003) clearly delineates this challenge in the following words, "... in the absence of openness on the topic of sexuality and disclosure of HIV infection and in the face of stigma, such a goal is difficult to attain".⁸⁰ Furthermore, Chitando (2008) states, "Stigma discourages people living with HIV or AIDS from seeking care and support as they fear discrimination".⁸¹

Stigma, therefore, is more dangerous to people living with HIV and AIDS. It is a burden for most women, especially those that are in areas where people still lack understanding and openness about HIV and AIDS. This means that there is need for more outreach programmes from experts in HIV and AIDS that can help in teaching people, especially those in rural areas like St Alois Mission Station, about the facts of HIV and AIDS. This will help people to understand HIV and AIDS in a more enlightened and empathetic light. Another ember that fuels the flame of the HIV epidemic is the 'covenant' of silence surrounding matters of sex and sexuality. The fear of disclosure for married women sometimes forces them to secretly go for the HIV test without telling their husbands, even when they know that they are not the ones who brought the disease. Those who come back with positive results cannot discuss this with their husbands, thus forcing them to take the ARV's secretly. What then does that say about women and HIV? An answer to this may not be an easy one yet women continue to suffer the stigma of discrimination.

In other words, women are forced to hide their status when in reality they are getting more exposed to HIV and AIDS. Silence in the area of sexuality is also understood as part good behaviour for any women. As such silence and sexuality are also another factor that makes women become more vulnerable to HIV infection.

Having noted how stigmatisation was viewed in Greek society, it is also important at this point to further our discussion on women's status from a historical perspective. The purpose

⁸⁰ Philippe Denis, 2003. "Sexuality and AIDS in South Africa". *Journal of Southern Africa* 115, pg. 63-77.

⁸¹ Ezra Chitando. 2008b, pg. 183.

for this discussion is to make us aware of some of the root causes of gender injustice. Thus, we try to trace back the history of some societies and discuss how women were vulnerable. At least two societies will be used as examples and these are the Jewish society and the Early Christian Church. On the Early Christian Church we shall focus mainly on how the Fathers of the Church defined women.

2.4 History of Women's Vulnerability

Women's vulnerability can be described as a vicious circle; one which has its roots mainly in the Jewish culture as we shall see in our discussion. Thus, issues of gender, culture, patriarchy and stigma have always existed in different forms throughout human history. Their position in the history of humanity has always been considered of less value. This means that even before the advent of HIV, women had always been exposed and been vulnerable in one way or the other. While there may be many other situations that reduced women to a lower status in humanity, we shall focus only on two situations that clearly point to how women were considered to be less than human, hence fuelling their vulnerability in those particular societies.

2.4.1 Women in the Jewish Culture

In the Jewish culture, women were restricted to roles of little or no authority and were largely confined to their father's or husband's home.⁸² From the Second Temple period, women were not allowed to testify in court trials and they could not go out in public, or talk to strangers. When out of home, they were to be doubly veiled.⁸³ "They had become second-class Jews, excluded from the worship and teaching of God, with status scarcely above that of slaves."⁸⁴ Women could not actively participate in the synagogue services. The Jewish tradition did not allow a woman to study Law, nor could she teach in any formal manner. Rabbi Eliezer wrote

⁸² <http://www.religioustolerance.org/cfebibl.htm> (Accessed on 11 October 2009).

⁸³ <http://www.religioustolerance.org/cfebibl.htm> (Accessed on 11 October 2009)

⁸⁴ B.M. Metzger and M.B. Coogan, 1993. "The Oxford Companion to the Bible", New York: Oxford University Press, pg. 806.

in the 1st century CE: “Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman...Whoever teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches her obscenity.”⁸⁵

One Jewish Morning Prayer said by the free Jewish men was to thank God that they had not been born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman.⁸⁶ One Rabbi is also quoted as saying that men were not to talk too much with women because according to him,

Everyone that talks much with a woman causes evil to himself, and desists from the work of the Law, and his end is that he inherits Gehena. A strict Jewish Rabbi would not greet a woman on the street, nor even his wife, daughter, mother, or sister. The duty of a good Jewish woman was to send her sons to the synagogue, to attend domestic concerns, to leave her husband free to study the scriptures, and to keep house until he returned.⁸⁷

According to Nasimiye-Wasike, “In the Jewish worldview a woman was considered a constant danger to the man. Therefore women were kept away from the public eye in order to protect men from this danger.”⁸⁸ From this definition of women in the Jewish culture we can see that the oppression of women has its roots in the patriarchal society. Women were disempowered, excluded and meant to submit to their male counterparts.

Thus, the oppression of women in the Jewish culture may appear as history in our thinking but this oppression continues to emerge seriously in different forms, both in the Christian Church and in society. Women in every generation and in every society go through their own experience of patriarchal oppression. The problem of gender is even found common in the Ancient Jewish patriarchal world where women were also treated as less than human. We also see the same understanding of women within the Early Church.

2.4.2 Definition of Women According to the Fathers of the Early Church

It is generally agreed that Christianity has been strongly influenced by Jewish culture. It has adopted many Jewish practices. Its teachings are shaped and formed by the Jewish way of life. As such, the understanding of women in Christianity for instance, cannot be understood

⁸⁵ Rabbi Eliezer, ‘Mishnah, Sotah 3:4.

⁸⁶ <http://www.religioustolerance.org/cfebibl.htm> (Accessed on 11 October 2009).

⁸⁷ William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, (Revised edition pp 66-67).

⁸⁸ Anne Nasimiyu-Wasinke. 1991. “Christology and an African Woman’s Experience”, in R.J. Schreiter (ed). *Introduction: Jesus Christ in Africa Today*. New York: Orbis Books, pg. 74.

outside that of the Jewish culture. In the following section, we shall discuss the attitude of some of the Fathers of the Church who were influential in the Early Christian Church.

The teachings of the Fathers of the Church have made an impact in the growth of the Christian Church. Their teachings have been considered very important, for they have been used to form the basis of the Christian faith. While the Fathers of the Church have contributed substantially to the growth and development of the Early Church, most of them have not paid attention to the role of women both in Church and in society. Instead, they have even fuelled the undermining of women in the world. In trying to explain how the early Church Fathers negatively defined women in the early centuries of the Christian Church, Rakoczy (2004) describes the whole enterprise as “*Bad News*”.⁸⁹ During that time, women were generally described as the cause of sin by the Fathers of the Church.

Ruether (1983) cites the works of Thomas Aquinas who presented the view that women are malformed males and therefore constitute the abnormal half of the human species.⁹⁰ Similarly, Rakoczy (2004) quotes Kaene (1988:4) where John Chrysostom (349-407) rages against women in the following words: “Among all savage beasts, none is found to be harmful as women.”⁹¹ Rakoczy also proceeds to quote Kaene (1988) who explains the horrible words of John Damascene as follows: “Woman is a sick she-ass... a hideous tapeworm ... the advance post of hell.”⁹²

The above definitions of women by the Fathers of the early Church clearly indicate how women were totally undermined during the early centuries. This teaching about women by the respected Fathers of the Church contributed heavily in pushing Christian women back into their original place of marginalisation. The transformation that had happened during the time of Jesus gradually disappeared. These negative views have continued to shape the mentality of many Churches and societies up to this present day.

The mentality of the Jewish culture and the teaching of the Early Fathers of the Church on women have not spared the African culture. Christianity came into Africa shaped by these

⁸⁹ Susan Rakoczy. 2004, pg. 30.

⁹⁰ Rosemary R. Ruether. 1983. *Sexism and God-Talk*. Boston: Beacon; London: SCM.

⁹¹ Susan Rakoczy. 2004, pg. 31.

⁹² Susan Rakoczy. 2004, pg. 31.

teachings. However, this does not mean that African culture did not have its own oppressive practices regarding women. Culture for instance, has always been an instrument of oppression for women. Christianity could have come to liberate women from cultural and religious forms of oppression but the transformation had been too slow. The Church in Africa has not done enough to challenge different forms of women's oppression.

2.5 Towards an Improved Life for Women Living with HIV and AIDS

The following discussion lays bare the fact that the spread of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe, and in particular for women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station, followed several 'fault-lines' that were already in existence prior to the outbreak of the pandemic. It is therefore pertinent that these 'fault-lines' be realigned as a matter of urgency if any progress is to be made in terms of stemming the tide of the epidemic. The society should therefore make a concerted effort to address and redress gender inequality, violence and injustice and other social evils that provide 'fertile ground' for the rapid spread of the epidemic. In this challenging period of HIV and AIDS, the Church of St Alois must be willing to name and condemn the identified factors that push women into a situation of vulnerability and susceptibility to HIV and AIDS. Most women are looking forward to see the Church becoming actively involved in the work of transforming harmful practices that hinder them from freedom of life.

The Church needs to educate its members about HIV and AIDS as well as enlighten them on how not to stigmatise and discriminate against those who are already infected or affected by HIV.

As has been noted earlier in this chapter, apart from exacerbating the rapid spread of HIV and AIDS, culture has also been used as an excuse to curtail the participation of most men in the provision of care for members of the family or community who are either infected or affected by the epidemic. As noted by Chirongoma and Manda (2008)

It is unfortunate that men have not matched women's leadership in the HIV era in Africa. It is women who have ensured that the home-based care programmes are effective. It is women in faith-based organisations who are providing effective prevention, care and support programmes. Women constitute the bulk of the volunteers and have mobilised themselves to make a difference. In most instances,

men have stayed out of the picture. There is need to change the situation and ensure that men are more visible in the struggle against the HIV epidemic.⁹³

It is therefore critical that men play an effective leadership role as they currently wield a lot of power and influence. Due to patriarchy, it is men who tend to preside over affairs of nations, communities and families. Their proactive leadership in the response to the HIV epidemic would make a whole world of difference. Solidarity in caring for those affected and infected with HIV will lead men to interrogate their privileges under patriarchy. While the world continues to preach the message of hope, abstinence, faithfulness and condom use, African women are suffocating under oppressive cultural traditions. In this light, I concur with Shoko (2008) who proposes a ‘new model’ of relating, aimed towards women’s emancipation.

In order to attain the liberation of women, it is important that in areas where women are viewed as inferior, they need to be emancipated and search for a new model that integrates women in all aspects of life in society, at home or in other social institutions. Therefore, society together with the Church has a duty to value human life, a theme that resonates with the teachings of African traditional religion and culture as well as the Church. Since HIV and AIDS is a threat to human life and more so to women, society should strive to transform negative norms and values and adopt responsible attitudes in the face of the devastating impact of the epidemic. Regarding this matter, the following suggestions propounded by Shoko (2008) offer illustrative lessons to the community surrounding St Alois Mission Station. He states,

In Karanga (Shona) society, culture and religious sexism does determine the status of women. However tradition gives two positions, one that is positive where women’s roles are given elevated status. On the other hand, the dominant position seeks to subordinate women to men. Religion and culture must be harnessed in the struggle to build a better society. In particular, they must enable men to regard positive values that are vital to the liberation of women and men. It is unfortunate that these values have not received as much emphasis as those that understate the status of women. There is need for partnership between men and women if the challenges associated

⁹³ Sophie Chirongoma and Manda D.L. . 2008. “*Ubuntu and Women’s Health Agency in Contemporary South Africa*” in Steve de Gruchy, Sytse Strijbos and Nico Koopman (eds). *From our Side: Emerging Perspectives on Development and Ethics*. Amsterdam: Rozenberg Publishers, pg. 204-205

with HIV and AIDS, development, human rights and other contemporary concerns are to be overcome.⁹⁴

I have cited Shoko at considerable length here because he sums up the key issues discussed in this chapter, offering very practical and workable solutions to the challenges that have been identified in the chapter. When it comes to ministering to those who are affected and infected with HIV, I concur with Chitando (2007) who views the role of the Church from an African perspective. He charges that “African churches need *friendly feet* to journey with individuals and communities living with HIV and AIDS, *warm hearts* to demonstrate compassion and *anointed hands* to effect healing.”⁹⁵ Chitando challenges the church to exercise its pastoral ministry in dealing with people living with HIV and AIDS. This implies that the Church needs to take up the mission of journeying with people living with HIV and AIDS. To stress the point, Chitando (2008b) quotes Musa Dube who asserts that the mission of the Church in the era of HIV and AIDS is to wipe away tears from the faces of African women, integrating people living with HIV, and surrounding those affected by HIV with love and compassion.⁹⁶ This citation is relevant to women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that women’s vulnerability to HIV and AIDS is mainly a gendered issue. It is a gendered issue because the factors responsible for the spread of HIV infection, as discussed in this chapter, are within the framework of what is socially expected from a woman and from a man. All the factors are products of social construction. Thus human beings are gendered beings all the time and everywhere. Because of how gender has been constructed, many people have come to understand that gender is natural or biological. We have seen that these ideologies need to be transformed. The Church is facing a challenge in this time of HIV and AIDS. In the context of this research, the vulnerability of women living with HIV and AIDS calls for total transformation. The Catholic Church of St Alois is challenged to provide an effective and sustained response to the epidemic.

⁹⁴ T. Shoko . 2008. *Gender, Sexuality and Emancipation: Women in Karanga Religion*, pg. 83.

⁹⁵ Ezra Chitando. 2007, pg. 1.

⁹⁶ Ezra Chitando. 2008. Other Ways of Being a Divine-Healer: Musa W. Dube and the African Church’s Response to HIV and AIDS in E. Chitando, *Mainstreaming HIV and AIDS in Theological Education: Experiences and Explorations*, pg. 98.

Apart from the discussed factors, the next chapter will discuss another cause which has pushed women, particularly those living with HIV and AIDS, further into the margins of the society. We shall look into the reality of the current physical hunger and consequential poverty in the area of St Alois and see how the situation is affecting women living with HIV and AIDS. The situation will be analysed in the context of the implementation of Fast Track Land Reform Programme and its aftermath.

CHAPTER THREE

NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF FAST TRACK LAND REFORM PROGRAMME

3.1 Introduction

Chapter two stated the many factors that are responsible for women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS. The chapter discussed the differences that characterise women and men's respective social roles based on their biological distinctiveness, commonly known as gender issues. In the context of the research, gender issues have been explained as being biased. Women have been portrayed as the most oppressed group in every sector of life mainly because of their biological nature. Apart from factors discussed in chapter two, chapter three will take into account some of the current problems facing Zimbabwe today and in particular women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station who are living with HIV and AIDS. These problems emerged mostly as a result of the implementation of Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP)⁹⁷ and its negative impacts on the nation. Four challenges that accompanied FTLRP will be discussed and these are: the collapse of the agricultural sector, the economic meltdown, poverty and hunger. The current situation in Zimbabwe makes us reflect on how the Church of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station can exercise its pastoral mission in addressing the challenges that are faced by women living with HIV and AIDS. This chapter, therefore, briefly discusses the politics of land and its negative effects on women living with HIV and AIDS.

The chapter will not cover all the details attached to land reforms in Zimbabwe but will focus on areas that are relevant to the study area. As a starting point, the chapter will briefly describe the importance of land for the Shona people of Zimbabwe. This will help us have a picture of why the abuse of land can be a cause for suffering by the vulnerable groups in Zimbabwe, and will also help us to understand why there is so much conflict over the issue of land in the current crisis of Zimbabwe. The chapter will then develop further to discuss Fast Track Land Reform Programme and how it negatively affected the economy of the country as this causes the advent of poverty and hunger for the majority of the people, especially the rural folk.

⁹⁷ Fast Track Land Reform (FTLR) is a programme which was launched by ZANU PF ruling government of Zimbabwe in 2000 with the stated aim of taking land from rich white commercial farmers for distribution to poor and middle- income indigenous landless Zimbabweans.

3.2 The Meaning of Land for the *Shona* People of Zimbabwe

Land and its agricultural importance has been a source of livelihood for the whole nation of Zimbabwe for a long time. It is the central component of life in Zimbabwe, hence it is understood as family or community property. Explained by Bakare (1993), “Land is there to be shared between brothers and sisters and not to be hoarded for self security.”⁹⁸ This implies that the right to land belongs to all members of the society. Setiloane (1991) advances this observation by asserting that, “Land is not wealth, like cattle, sheep or goats. It cannot be possessed nor held to the exclusion of the good and survivors of the total community. It is like rain, and river waters or wood in the forest, a natural provision.”⁹⁹ Before the coming of the white settlers into the country, the chiefs were the ones in charge of distributing land fairly to their people. This is affirmed by Gelfand who says, “... the chief is responsible for ensuring that every clansman is given a portion of land equal to that of others; he has to settle their family disputes and to judge their offences.”¹⁰⁰ Fairness and justice over distribution of land meant that the poor were covered and poverty was, therefore, not something so threatening. Even women would not feel the burden of caring for the family because land was always available for every family’s needs.

Since the arrival of the white settlers in Zimbabwe, around 1890, the meaning and understanding of land for the *Shona* people started to change. As observed by Bakare (1993),

When the white settlers arrived in the country, they simply took the land they wanted by conquest. They started by fixing boundaries on those portions of land that attracted them most in terms of resources. By so doing, many indigenous people were forcibly removed to make land available for the agriculturalists.¹⁰¹

The majority of the indigenous people found themselves crowded into less productive communal areas. The right of distribution of land shifted from the traditional chiefs to the white European settlers. In fact, the indigenous Zimbabweans ended up with no rights over their own land. They were not happy and the situation needed to be changed.

⁹⁸ Sebastian Bakare. 1993. *My Right to Land: A Theology of Land in Zimbabwe*. Gweru. Mambo Press, pg. 53.

⁹⁹ Gabriel M. Setiloane. 1991. Land in the Negotiations Chamber. *Journal of Black Theology* 5 (2), 29-39.

¹⁰⁰ Gelfand, M 1981. *Ukama: Reflections on Shona and Western Cultures in Zimbabwe*. Gweru: Mambo Press, pg. 10.

¹⁰¹ Sebastian Bakare. 1993. pg. 83.

3.3 Land: Motive behind the Liberation Struggle

The practice of boundaries continued to dominate in the country, creating more divisions of land, with most of the fertile land being taken by the Europeans. The areas that were designated for Africans became more and more over-populated because land became relatively scarce and overused. Many people became frustrated because they could not meet their basic food requirements. As pointed out by Tarimo (2003) “Land expropriation and eviction of the natives from the fertile lands sparked conflicts, which later on became the motive to fight for independence.”¹⁰² The main purpose of the struggle was to get back land to the indigenous ownership. Zimbabwe finally gained its independence on the 18 April 1980.

3.4 The Current Zimbabwean Government and the Issue of Land

Independence was definitely a great event for the people of Zimbabwe. It brought euphoria and great expectations to many indigenous Zimbabweans. The majority of people, especially those who were squeezed into infertile portions of land by the white settlers, anticipated that there would definitely be a just redistribution of land to the black majority because the new government for the blacks had taken over from the white settlers.

As the years continued to unfold after independence, people realized that their hopes would not come to fruition. Events did not turn out as had been hoped for. The new government acquired large tracks of land for the purpose of redistributing them to the needy but no significant resettlement took place. Instead, attitudes of greed and selfishness were clearly in control of the whole question of land, which raises serious doubts as to the extent to which the land reform programme has benefited the landless poor people of Zimbabwe. Rightly put by Bakare (1993),

The landless peasants, who had hoped for more land after Independence, as promised during the liberation struggle, saw the very land disappear into the pockets of *chefs* (the ruling class). The land reform programme, which is intended to correct the past inequitable, land distribution, remains mere political rhetoric twelve years after

¹⁰² Aquellinna Tarimo. 2003. The Second Scramble for Land in Africa. *Africa Tomorrow* 2 (3), 105-127.

Independence. Access to land is no longer a birthright, but a right for those who have the influence, power and money.¹⁰³

Independence for Zimbabweans lost its meaning. The population were frustrated because “for years after independence, many rural black people had been living on over-crowded communal land.”¹⁰⁴ The government’s failure to redistribute land to the needy landless meant that it lost the support of the majority citizens. The government became generally unpopular. Realising how unpopular the government had become, the same government needed to make a move in order to get back people’s support. It is then that we see the government introducing the Fast Track Land Reform Programme.

3.5 Fast Track Land Reform Programme

As explained earlier in the footnote, the Fast Track Land Reform Programme was meant to take land from the white commercial farmers and give it to the indigenous landless Zimbabweans. The implementation of the programme was marked by the seizure of white commercial farms in the name of the (FTLRP), and it triggered many discussions both locally and internationally because of the manner in which it was implemented. As we shall see in our discussion, FTLRP was accompanied by political instability, poverty and hunger and hence pushed many people into a state of vulnerability.

3.5.1 Background of the Implementation of Fast Track Land Reform Programme

In 1999, nineteen years after Independence, a strong and organised opposition party, Movement for Democratic Party (MDC) was founded. The formation of the new party was welcomed by people because they could at least express their anger through the newly formed party. As stated by Chirongoma (2009) “The February 2000 constitution referendum was promoted as the people’s chance to take Zimbabwe’s democracy into new millennium.”¹⁰⁵ This therefore was the first sign to indicate the anger of the population at the new constitution. Chirongoma, furthers her observation by stating that, “The referendum marked the first political defeat for the leadership of ZANU-PF and became a watershed year

¹⁰³ Sebastian Bakare. 1993, pg. 74.

¹⁰⁴ Sarah Hudleston. 2005. *Face of Courage: A Biography of Morgan Tsvangirai*. Cape Town: Double Storey Books, pg. 60.

¹⁰⁵ Sophie Chirongoma. 2009. An exploration of operation *Murambatsvina* Especially on those Affected by HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe, in Ezra Chitando and Nonthando Hadebe (eds). *Compassionate Circles*. Geneva:

in Zimbabwe's political history."¹⁰⁶ Thus, as Gundani (2002) says, "Its rejection sent immediate shock waves into ZANU-PF leadership."¹⁰⁷ This rejection of the draft constitution was Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF)'s first defeat since the independence of Zimbabwe and this came as a shock to the ruling party. "For the first time since his ruling party was swept into office in 1980, Mugabe faced the real prospect of losing power to an opposition party."¹⁰⁸ Without wasting time, as stated by Hill (2005), "Mugabe moved quickly. Within a few days of the referendum, he had harnessed the power of his former guerrillas, most of whom now live in poverty around the world."¹⁰⁹ This view is shared by Meldrum (2004) when he concurs,

Within two weeks of the rejection of his [Mugabe's] constitution, he had come up with a new strategy that would crush his opponents, quell the stirring of unrest within his party and reinvigorate his image as the most radical African leader: the land invasions.¹¹⁰

In a further comment, Meldrum (2004) says, "On the eve of 2000, the ruling government had become so unpopular that its attempt to amend the country's constitution to give more powers to the executive and increase and consolidate the presidential powers, met stiff resistance from the majority".¹¹¹

3.5.2 Land Invasions

With parliamentary elections scheduled to take place in June 2000, the government launched an aggressive campaign. The formation of MDC put the government under pressure to speed up the land reform programme as a way to get the people back into the ruling party. This was the beginning of serious land invasions. According to Meredith's explanation on the land invasions,

WCC Publications, pg. 79.

¹⁰⁶ Sophie Chirongoma. 2009, pg 79.

¹⁰⁷ Paul Gundani. 2002. The Land Crisis in Zimbabwe and the Role of the Churches Towards its Resolution. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 28 (2) 122-169.

¹⁰⁸ Buckle, C. 2001. *African Tears: The Zimbabwe Land Invasions*. Johannesburg: COVOS DAY, pg. xi.

¹⁰⁹ Geoff Hill. 2005. *What Happens After Mugabe?: Can Zimbabwe Rise From Ashes?* Cape Town: Zebra Press, pg. 16.

¹¹⁰ Andrew Meldrum. 2004, *Where We Want Hope: A Memoir of Zimbabwe*. Murray Publishers, pg. 119.

¹¹¹ Andrew Meldrum. 2004. pg. 120.

In a carefully coordinated campaign starting on February 26, 2000, gangs armed with axes and *pangas* invaded white owned farms across the country. Government and army trucks were used to transport them to the farms and keep them supplied with rations once there.¹¹²

Indeed, this concurs with what Norman (2008) says, “A period of mob violence ensued, when Mugabe authorised war veterans to seize farms from their owners by force.”¹¹³ Hunter, Farren and Farren advance this observation by asserting that, “The occupations and the violence were instigated and directed by the government, and the perpetrators were transported, supplied, sustained and paid by government agencies under the control of the ruling party, using taxpayers’ money.”¹¹⁴ In fighting to remain in power, the government passed another bill in 2001, which gave it the unlimited powers to take land from anyone without any recourse to the courts. This bill is called “Presidential Powers Act”.¹¹⁵

In November 2001, Mugabe delivered a final blow. By presidential decree, he ordered the expropriation of virtually all white owned farms without compensation. “Farmers were told they would be given ninety days to vacate their homes and properties and threatened with imprisonment if they tried to interfere.”¹¹⁶ War veterans and loyal ZANU-PF militia were empowered to do anything they could to get rid of the white farmers and their workers from their farms. The process of evicting these farmers was accompanied by intimidation, assaults and even killing of some of the white farmers. Meanwhile, the police did not intervene. Stated by Meredith (2008),

The police commissioner. Augustine Chihuri, an ex-combatant himself, claimed there was nothing the police could do to stop the invasions. “It is a political issue,” he said. “What do you expect the police to do?...Talk to the politicians about it”.¹¹⁷

They did not take any action against perpetrators of violent crimes. Instead, they watched people being harassed and tortured and made no effort to help. Maybe the police commissioner was correct in saying that the police had nothing to do with politics, but the

¹¹² Martin Meredith. 2008. *Mugabe: Power, Plunder, and the Struggle for Zimbabwe*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, pg. 167.

¹¹³ Andrew Norman, A. 2008. *Mugabe: Teacher, Revolutionary, Tyrant*. London: The History Press, pg. 105.

¹¹⁴ Glyn Hunter, L. Farren and A. Farren. 2001. *Voices of Zimbabwe: The Pain, The Courage, The Hope*. Johannesburg: COVOS DAY, pg. 17.

¹¹⁵ Campbell, H. 2003. *Reclaiming Zimbabwe: The Exhaustion of the Patriarchal Model of Liberation*. Claremont: David Phillip Publishers, pg. 96.

¹¹⁶ Martin Meredith. 2008, pg. 223.

problem would then be to define the role of the police in a situation whereby people of its nation are in serious human rights violations. While Chihuri said that the police had no right to intervene in the politics of land, "...it soon became evident not only that the invaders were being paid but that prominent Zanu-PF officials, army officers, CIO agents, and even police officers were actively involved in directing events."¹¹⁸ As such, the invasions took place accompanied by killings and abuses of the white farmers, together with their black workers, with no one challenging or stopping these abuses.

After many white farmers were removed violently from their farms, land grabbing became ever more chaotic. Soldiers, policemen, air force officers, war veterans, government officials, party officials, and peasants descended on commercial farms in their thousands in a wild scramble for land as the new rainy season began, building shacks, cutting down trees, hunting down wildlife, and looting abandoned buildings. Any hint of resistance was dealt with by assaults, death threats, and forced eviction.¹¹⁹

From this view, we can see that the implementation of FTLRP was politicised and, therefore, can be viewed as a major disaster to the country as its negative impact was felt almost immediately. Commenting on how disastrous the programme was to the country since its implementation, Meredith (2002) says, "Zimbabwe has been reduced to bankrupt and impoverished state, threatened by economic collapse and catastrophic food shortages."¹²⁰

This shows that the distribution was definitely done on political grounds. The ordinary people who genuinely needed land to raise crops for themselves as a resource to fight poverty were denied access to land as long as they were suspected to be supporters of opposition parties. The allocation of land was characterised by greediness. The use of land as a political weapon was condemned by the ordinary observers. According to Tarimo (2003),

"President Robert Mugabe made a mistake by linking land reforms with the elections of 2002 through the intimidation of the white settlers in order to remain in power."¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Martin Meredith. 2008, pg. 169.

¹¹⁸ Martin Meredith. 2008, pg 169.

¹¹⁹ Martin Meredith. 2008, pg. 197.

¹²⁰ Martin Meredith. 2002. *Robert Mugabe: Power, Plunder, and Tyranny in Zimbabwe*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, pg. 228.

¹²¹ A. Tarimo. 2003, 2 (3), 105-127.

With presidential elections due in 2002 Hill (2005:18) says, “By this time, the majority of white farmers had been forced off their land, and, as has been the case with earlier attempts at redistribution, the best farms were handed out to ministers and loyal supporters who helped to keep ZANU-PF in power.”¹²² As years continued to unfold, the remaining white farmers continued to encounter threats, so much that, “... by 2004, all but 300 of the original 4 000 white farmers were off the land”.¹²³

The farm invasions done in the name of FTLRP had had a devastating effect on the agriculture sector which is the main producer of food in the country. This is clarified by Hunter, Farren and Farren (2001) when they say, “The farm invasions were a blue print for economic disaster.”¹²⁴ Seemingly, Meredith adds that:

Land reform universally agreed upon as a matter of utmost urgency, has been twisted into a fast-track to further the self-aggrandisement of the chiefs and misery for masses. What should have improved the lot of every Zimbabwean is now viewed as irrevocably partisan, and is associated with disorder, violence and displacement.¹²⁵

With this background of the FTLRP, we shall now look at how this programme affected the country and how in particular the programme impacted on women living with HIV and AIDS and those living in the area of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station.

3.6 The Negative Impacts of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme

In view of the above discussion, the land redistribution programme, therefore, is also thought to have contributed to the AIDS epidemic in several ways. As the white commercial farmers were forced to leave their farms, a number of farm workers lost their jobs. As a result, they were forced to move to different areas looking for places to live. This implies that the situation displaced people, especially those who were working on the farms for the white commercial farmers. In some cases, families were forced to separate because the father of the family would have to look for a job somewhere else, most probably in neighbouring towns. Meanwhile, with the disruption of farming communities, the economy deteriorated, leading to

¹²² Geoff Hill. 2005, pg. 18.

¹²³ Geoff Hill. 2005, pg. 6.

¹²⁴ Glyn. Hunter, L. Farren and A. Farren. 2001, pg. 135.

¹²⁵ Martin Meredith. 2008, pg. 222.

increased poverty and reduced access to education and healthcare. All these problems are likely to have widened sexual networks and increased the risk of HIV transmission.

Violence against farmers was practically encouraged by the ruling government, a climate of lawlessness ensued in many areas and cases of rape became increasingly alarming, making women more vulnerable to the HIV infection.

3.6.1 The Collapse of Agricultural Sector

The Zimbabwean population depends on subsistence agriculture; crops, livestock and other natural resources as the mainstay of economy and export earnings. The commercial sector has always been the main producer of food in the country. The decline in agricultural production mainly as a result of the implementation of FTLRP, therefore, created some problems in the country. The land invasions in the name of FTLRP for example, have been one of the major causes of poverty in Zimbabwe. The impact was so huge. The rushed and unplanned seizure of farms gave birth to a rapid significant decline in agricultural production as many farmers were forcibly removed from their farms. As noted by Meredith 2008, “With so many farms disrupted, destroyed and left untended, Zimbabwe now faced serious food shortages to add to its list of woes.”¹²⁶ Agricultural markets and institutions were seriously weakened.

The invasions spelt the end of commercial agriculture as a major industry. According to the research made by the Council of Churches, “The economic decline assumed exponential impetus following the launch of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme in 2000, and gave way to unrelenting downward spiral and economic meltdown.”¹²⁷ Thus, a sharp decline in the economy was immediately felt throughout the nation. The impact on food supplies was calamitous, compounding the effects of drought. Pointed out by Meredith (2008),

“To survive, Zimbabwe became increasingly dependent on food imports and foreign relief supplies a once prosperous country reduced to taking handouts.”¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Martin Meredith. 2008, pg. 221.

¹²⁷ The Zimbabwe We Want: 2006, pg. 5.

¹²⁸ Martin Meredith. 2008, pg. 231.

The farms that were taken from the trained and skilled white farmers were given to untrained and unskilled elite indigenous Zimbabweans. The newly settled farmers did not have farming resources and enough skilled experience in farming dynamics. Since the time when the programme was introduced around 2000, a serious shortage of basic consumer commodities was experienced, such as maize meal, sugar, cooking oil, salt, bread, rice, milk soap, etc which were nowhere to be found in the country. Assessing the situation of the programme, Hill says,

Traditional export crops such as tobacco and cotton; as well as oil seed crops like soya beans; groundnuts and sunflower declined the most. While agricultural production has suffered across the board, the most crippling impact has been in specialised production system. These include dairy, beef production, horticulture, wild life and timber production. By failing to produce export crops, the country started to face serious shortage of foreign currency; a drying up of foreign direct investment and a very significant shrinkage of the entire economy.¹²⁹

3.6.2 Economic Meltdown

The current state of the economy in Zimbabwe is not acceptable to the well being of people. The economic disruption that has resulted from land invasions during the FTLRP program is unimaginable. As clearly stated by Hunter, Farren and Farren (2001),

The violence being visited on the farms caused huge damage throughout the economy. The commercial farming sector, the country, largest employer and a major foreign currency earner, was under siege. Banks feared collapse as a massive volume of farming debtors failed to repay loans. Consumers were afraid to spend, and businesses shut down. Tourism, a major source of foreign currency, declined by an unsustainable 80%. It seemed that private property rights throughout the nation were worth nothing. Government leaders boasted of their intention to seize mines and businesses for redistribution to the party faithful.¹³⁰

This observation is supported by the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) research findings which assert that:

This was manifested in the denudation of professionals and skilled personnel through a massive brain drain into the diaspora, hyper-inflation, widespread shortages of essential inputs and basic commodities, decline in agricultural and manufacturing productivity, shortages of foreign currency, escalating corruption, flight of foreign

¹²⁹ Geoff Hill. 2003. *The Battle for Zimbabwe: The Final Countdown*. Cape Town: Zebra Press, pg. 85.

¹³⁰ Glyn Hunter, L. Farren and A. Farren. 2001, pg. 17.

investments, rampant black marketeering in everything ranging from foreign currency to scarce commodities, declared and undeclared sanctions and dwindling tourist arrivals.¹³¹

The Council of Churches further their argument by stating that

These negative indicators have inflicted a heavy toll on the generality of the population. The quality of life, has suffered immeasurably. There is evidence of a rapid growth of numbers of the rural and urban poor, as well as the unemployed. In addition, the insidious HIV/AIDS pandemic is having a catastrophe effect on the country's social, economic and moral fabric. The turn of events has led to disillusionment, which translates into a sense of national despair and loss of hope.¹³²

In this regard, many companies have been forced to close down, resulting in a huge percentage of people losing their jobs. As emphasized by Hill (2005), "Across Zimbabwe, urban unemployment rose drastically as year after year, schools and universities pushed more graduates into the job market, where fewer than one in four people was in formal employment."¹³³ Tuition fees and levies have risen tremendously, so much so that a good number of parents cannot afford to pay fees for their children, let alone the children orphaned by HIV/AIDS - which has been the cause of many adult deaths and of those from poor background families. Salaries for those few who are still working are not even enough to provide for the basic minimum needs of families.

Many people are therefore struggling to feed their families as escalating inflation continues to shoot up. The situation keeps the majority poor, preventing them from working, and maintains a high level of inequality between the rich and the poor.

Desperate to escape economic collapse, hundreds of thousands of Zimbabweans left the country. By 2004 more than three million had fled one quarter of the population most heading for South Africa in the hope of finding work. The hardships facing those who remained grew ever more arduous. Except for the rich elite, each day turned into a struggle for survival. Unemployment reached 80 percent; food shortages were commonplace.¹³⁴

The migration included the much needed professionals like doctors, nurses, teachers, etc. Because of the shortage of highly qualified personnel in the education system, for example,

¹³¹ The Zimbabwe We Want: 2006, pg. 27.

¹³² The Zimbabwe We Want: 2006, pg. 5.

¹³³ Geoff Hill. 2005, pg. 15.

¹³⁴ Martin Meredith. 2008, pg. 233.

activities in many public schools and institutions of higher education have come to a standstill. The health system has also been severely affected. The prolonged industrial action by the remaining medical professionals makes life more difficult for the sick people and even for those who look after the sick. Those infected with HIV moved rapidly to full blown AIDS because of poor care and poor nutrition. Conditions in hospitals and clinics throughout the country started to deteriorate. Picking up one example of the public hospitals in the capital of Zimbabwe, Meredith (2002) says:

Harare's main hospital, Parirenyatwa, once one of the finest health institutions in Southern Africa, was regarded as little more than a death trap, shunned by patients whenever possible. There were serious shortages of drugs and equipment, of bed linen, of protective clothing, of food. Its buildings were dilapidated, with leaking roofs, rusting pipes and broken toilets. Qualified staff departed for positions abroad in ever increasing numbers.¹³⁵

The Zimbabwe Council of Churches provides a full description of the situation of the country's economy. They say, "The Zimbabwean economy is currently in a crisis characterised by:

- High levels of inflation, currently estimated around four digit figures;
- High levels of national debt;
- Sanctions and withdrawal of international lines of credit;
- High levels of poverty with the rural folk suffering the brunt of such poverty;
- Food insecurity resulting from periodic droughts and the disruption of production within the programme of equi-distribution of land;
- High levels of unemployment as companies reduce production, this necessitates once again the phenomenon of split families, which was characteristic of the dual colonial economy, as people emigrate in search for jobs;
- Shortages of critical basic commodities on the formal market. Where such commodities are available, they are neither accessible nor affordable to the majority of the poor;

¹³⁵ Martin Meredith. 2002, pg. 160.

- A thriving parallel market for basic commodities. The beneficiaries of the price controls are therefore the speculators and dealers who are capitalising on the shortages by importing the needed goods which they sell at exorbitant prices;
- The thriving foreign currency parallel market which determines the prices of imported goods;
- The production of lower quality products, as producers are, forced to reduce inputs in order to maintain profit margins against a backdrop of rising input costs;
- Hardships faced by the general Zimbabweans as they struggle to survive;
- Government resorting to unconventional policy measure to confront the economic challenges.”¹³⁶

The discussed negative impacts caused by FTLRP were a disaster to the nation. The collapse of the agricultural sector resulted in economic meltdown and the economic meltdown no doubt brought the state of the nation into a dire and tragic situation.

The area of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station is situated in the remote area of the Midlands Province. Its local communities are certain to have been hard hit by the negative effects of FTLRP. The crisis as described above forced some men to leave their wives and children in search for something to live on. In most cases, mothers were left with the burden of caring for their dependent children in a situation where hunger was threatening the country. Out of desperation, some men crossed into other countries like South Africa, Botswana and other neighbouring countries hoping to get jobs so that they could get money to buy something for their families back at home. However, there was no guarantee that these people would be employed in other countries because in many cases they did not have legal papers to be in these other countries or qualifications, and as such, could not be legally employed. What then did this imply for women who remained at home with the burden of caring for their dependent children and other family members? They could not manage to fend for themselves and their children. They could not leave the children alone to search for food or any assistance. Some men or husbands left their families and never returned, while others would manage to come back home after a couple of years.

¹³⁶ The Zimbabwe We Want: 2006, pg. 28.

With the discussed cultural practices around issues of sexuality, wives would always accept to have sex with their husbands, who had been away for years, without even questioning how faithful the husband had been while he was away from her. This situation has exposed more women of St Alois Mission to HIV infection. Some of the factors that we discussed in chapter two, therefore, are again seen to be featuring during the implementation of FTLRP. Because of unequal sharing of responsibilities, women are the ones to suffer the burden of the impact of FTLRP. The fact that women are always placed on the lowest step of the human ladder, women's problems during the implementation of FTLRP doubled. Thus both the social and economic burden stripped women of their human dignity. As such, I therefore agree with Omoigui (2001) when she says, "Women in Africa are characterised by poverty, oppression and violation of their rights."¹³⁷

The collapse of the agricultural sector and the economic meltdown were accompanied by poverty and hunger for people more especially in rural communities.

3.7 Poverty in the Context of Fast Track Land Reform Programme

Poverty can be defined in many different ways. Different authors have come up with a variety of terms and abstractions to explain the word. This, therefore, explains that poverty means different things for different people. World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) provides essential numerous ways of describing poverty:

- Poverty results from people having limited access to basic necessities such as food, clean water, health care and education.
- Poverty can mean greater vulnerability to women and can result in poor self esteem, a sense of powerlessness and violence.
- Poverty is often multifaceted and includes unequal access to resources, opportunities and benefits, as well as positions of power and decision making.

¹³⁷ Omoigui, M. I. 2001. Tradition, Poverty and The Church in Akintunde, D. (ed) *African Culture and The Quest for Women's Rights*. Ibadan: Oluseyi, pg. 135.

- Poverty tends to exclude people from meaningful involvement in determining the allocation and distribution of society's resources.¹³⁸

The definitions of poverty as provided by WARC show the extent to which poverty can cripple the existence of humanity. Expressed by Johann Graaff (2001), "... it has economic, political, cultural, emotional, and psychological dimensions. It means people suffer many more wounds than just physical, and it means that poverty is a state of vulnerability."¹³⁹ As such, it can result from people having limited access to basic necessities such as food, health care and education. Poverty can also mean unequal access to resources, opportunities and benefits as well as positions of power and decision-making.¹⁴⁰ Additionally, poverty can mean greater vulnerability to women and can result in poor self-esteem, a sense of powerlessness and violence.¹⁴¹

Various studies illustrate how poverty affects more women than men. In a document written by the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, poverty is revealed as more affecting women than men. According to the report, "UN statistics show that while forming one-half of the world's population, women do three-fourths of the world's work, receive one-tenth of the world's salary, and own one-hundredth of the world's land."¹⁴² Similarly, Jaap Bogaards (1996) uses the United National Development Program statistics to illustrate that "...two thirds of the world's illiterate are women, 70 percent of the world's poor are women and women earn 30-40% less than men for the same work."¹⁴³

This indicates that it is not accidental that women are poor; but mainly it is because of an unequal power relationship. "Poverty marginalizes the majority of women and denies them the right to a decent standard of living."¹⁴⁴ Myers argues that "...women and girls receive

¹³⁸ World Alliance of Reformed Churches Researches. 2003. *Created in the Image of God: Hierarchy to Partnership*. Switzerland: WARC, pg. 108.

¹³⁹ Johann Graaff. (ed.) 2001. *Poverty and development: Introduction to Sociology*, Cape Town: Oxford Press Southern Africa, pg. 8.

¹⁴⁰ Leonard Boff, and Clovis Boff. 1987. pg. 69.

¹⁴¹ World Alliance of Reformed Churches Researches. 2003, pg. 108.

¹⁴² The Zimbabwe We Want: 2006, pg. 19.

¹⁴³ Jaap Bogaards. 1996. "Challenges for Tear Fund Holland in the Twenty-First Century" in *Transformation An International Evangelical Dialogue on Mission and Ethics*, 13 (4) (October/December), pg. 21-39.

¹⁴⁴ World Alliance of Reformed Churches Researches. 2003, pg. 108.

less schooling; have poorer nutrition, and receive less health care.”¹⁴⁵ Women are denied access to resources by partners with a greater economic power within the household. The question of how resources are allocated is complex and delicate. “...it is not only denial or allocation of material resources but also the responsibility, stress and threat of denial which complicates the life of individual household...” writes Sarah Payne.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, poverty affects more women, and in different ways than it affects men.

In the context of this research, politics in Zimbabwe, via the chaotic land reform, can be understood as the major cause of the current poverty in the country. A Shona proverb, *Panorwa nzombe mbiri uswa hwunoparara* literally meaning “Where two bulls fight, the grass suffers” may be helpful in explaining how the poor ordinary people always suffer the consequences of the political and socio-economic crisis. The ordinary people especially those in rural communities suffer the consequences of the implementation of FTLRP. With the country now in deep crisis, the negative impacts of the programme are being experienced by the poor and voiceless individuals and communities. With the drastic drop of the agricultural sector and the meltdown of the economy, rural communities in particular are crippled by poverty and this poverty is on the increase on a yearly basis.

3.7.1 Effects of Poverty on Women Living with HIV and AIDS as an effect of FTLRP

Women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station have been severely affected by the negative effects of FTLRP. Given that women’s roles and responsibilities are not the same as those of men, they are over-burdened by the additional responsibilities of caring for families, or trying to provide enough food in times of poverty. Apart from the consequences of FTLRP, women are economically disadvantaged and culturally oppressed. They lack resources to sustain themselves and their families. Some of the infected women may find themselves forced to have relationships with some men who have money and seem to be willing to take care of them. As such, they are forced to forget the risk of HIV and AIDS in order to get money to feed, clothe, and educate their children. I therefore agree with Orobator who says “HIV/AIDS increases poverty, and poverty increases the risk of HIV infection.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Bryant Myers. 1999. *Walking with the Poor, Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* New York: Orbis Books, pg. 57.

¹⁴⁶ Sarah Payne. 1991. *Women, health and poverty: An introduction*, Harvester British, pg. 13.

¹⁴⁷ Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator. 2005. *From Crisis to Kairos: The Mission of the Church in the Time of*

In the same way, Greyling (2002) argues that, “HIV and poverty are closely linked and each in turn increases the other; HIV/AIDS increases poverty, and poverty increases the risk of HIV infection and the impact of HIV/AIDS on families and communities.”¹⁴⁸ While Page (2001) says, “Poverty is the driving force of the AIDS pandemic in Africa”,¹⁴⁹ Pillay (2009) argues that, “Poverty does not cause HIV and AIDS but the poor and destitute, who in most instances are also women, are more prone to contracting the disease and in that sense poverty exacerbates the pandemic.”¹⁵⁰ From all these explanations we can notice that poverty and HIV and AIDS are intertwined and are, therefore, threatening to women. It also explains that in order for people to successfully overcome the challenge of HIV and AIDS, there is need to engage with the issue of poverty.

Reflecting on the collapse of the agricultural sector and the economic meltdown as explained earlier, poverty is not a passing phase, which may also be an explanation why HIV and AIDS will remain a challenge. The impact of FTLRP as a result of the collapse of agriculture and economic meltdown falls heavily on women, as they lack the ability to earn money and this influences life around them, thus exacerbating the economic, political and social pressure in which they are living. The rural people who need of land in order to be self-supporting, were deprived of this land because the land had been turned into a political tool and therefore could not easily be accessed. Because of the lack of adequate land for a livelihood, many poor people found themselves in a situation of dependence and extreme poverty or near starvation.

Up to the present day, the consequences of the 2000-2008 land reform programme is still severely affecting the majority of Zimbabweans, particularly the rural folk. Women of St Alois, especially those living with the burden of HIV and AIDS, have not been spared. They are desperately in need of food, shelter, clean water and other essential commodities. They also need an environment that supports life. If these commodities continue to be scarce, then poverty will continue to threaten people. The elite have used their power to oppress the poor.

HIV/AIDS, Refugees and Poverty. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, pg. 186.

¹⁴⁸ Christo Greyling. 2002. *Poverty and HIV and AIDS: The Challenge to the Churches in the New Millennium*. London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, pg. 13.

¹⁴⁹ S.L.J. Page. 2001. “Poverty: At the Root of Southern Africa’s AIDS Epidemic,” in UN Non-governmental Liaison Service, *Voices from Africa: NGO Responses to HIV/AIDS*, no. 10 (May 2001), pg. 83.

¹⁵⁰ Miranda Pillay. 2009. “Women in the Church: Toward Developing Community in the Context of HIV and AIDS”, in Ezra Chitando and Nonthando Hadebe (eds). *Compassion Circles: African Women Theologians Facing HIV*. Geneva: WCC Publications., pg. 104.

They have grabbed the land which is supposed to provide a livelihood for the majority and yet the same land is lying idle, not producing for the nation as it used to be. The destruction of white commercial farms, with no reconstructive measures put in place, meant that even the grain storage depots which used to stock many tons of food for the nation, especially in cases of drought, have since dried up. The country began to experience a serious periodic shortage of basic consumer commodities. With all these problems, the consequences were obvious: hunger and poverty. “With so many farms disrupted, destroyed and left untended, the Zimbabwean people started to face serious food shortages to add to its list of woes.”¹⁵¹ According to the churches, these problems impacted heavily on some marginalised groups. “These are mainly people in communal and resettlement areas, and those belonging to vulnerable social groups (HIV and AIDS) affected women, farm workers, etc”.¹⁵² These negative indicators have inflicted a heavy toll on the population generally and the most affected were the rural folk.

3.7.2 Hunger and Antiretroviral Therapy

With the situation of the food crisis in Zimbabwe today, those eligible for antiretroviral therapy, for example, are experiencing unbearable side effects because they take the antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) on an empty stomach. According to the report by World Health Organisation (WHO) on the condition of people living with HIV and AIDS, many people are unable to wait for the side effects to wear off and some are being forced to sell their monthly supply of medication to others, in exchange for money to buy food and other necessities.¹⁵³ By the very nature of ARVs, users need to have an adequate food supply to counter the adverse side effects. Lack of proper or enough food makes life difficult for women living with HIV and AIDS. Because there is no production in the commercial farms many people go hungry. In the effort to get food or earn a living, many women find themselves directly faced with HIV and AIDS pandemic.

Women of St Alois Mission who are living with HIV and AIDS are also facing the difficulty of the affordability of drugs. Given that they are in the remote area, access to health centres

¹⁵¹ Martin Meredith. 2002, pg. 197.

¹⁵² The Zimbabwe We Want: *A Discussion Document*, pg. 32.

¹⁵³ <http://www.healthdev.org/viewmsg.aspx?msgid=982a3552-1044-4af9-99ea-d4c558463694> (Accessed on 17.04.2009).

where drugs are available is a problem, because they would need to travel long distances by buses. Yet in this time of poverty they definitely cannot afford the fares. Hunger and poverty makes life unbearable for women living with HIV and AIDS. Good nutrition, therefore, is often the only means for people to slow progression from HIV to AIDS. Seemingly, improved nutrition enhances effective AIDS drug utilization.

With the discussed negative effects of FTLRP, the mission of the Church is always of great concern. The voice of the Church in the midst of such crisis becomes the hope of the most suffering, yet in the situation of St Alois Mission, the Church has not been openly challenging the crisis that is being faced by its own people. A much stronger and more informed role in standing with women living with HIV and AIDS is important for the Church. The priests and the pastoral ministers within the area in discussion are not heard talking about how this situation can be helped. I would believe that they are either ignorant of the topic or not interested in getting involved in the issue. As such, whatever action the ministers perform, will always form the basis of its local pastoral ministry.

Bellagamba (1992) views the mission of the Church as the way that it can effectively liberate the poor from such forms of oppression. He says: “Mission is helping people who are unjustly treated, persecuted, oppressed by internal and external forces, to liberate themselves, to experience the liberation, the salvation, and redemption brought by Christ.”¹⁵⁴ Therefore, HIV and AIDS positive women in the area under study need to be liberated, empowered and capacitated in a way that enables them to fend for themselves and their families and reduce hunger and poverty.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the issue of Fast Track Land Reform Programme. It has argued that the challenges that are encountered by Zimbabwe are mainly a result of the chaotic implementation of FTLRP. The sufferings of the rural communities, and in particular women living with HIV and AIDS, cannot be understood outside the politics of land reform, which occurred from 2000 to 2008. FTLRP was accompanied by the most challenging factors that have pushed the marginalised groups to the fringes of the society. The next chapter will focus

¹⁵⁴ Anthony Bellagamba. 1992. *Mission and Ministry in the Global Church*. New York: Orbis Books, pg. 53.

on how the church can be seen to be involved in the transformation of the current socio-economic and political crisis that the country is facing. The chapter attempts to focus on how the Catholic Church of St Alois Rural Mission can exercise its pastoral mission in addressing the challenges that are faced by women living with HIV and AIDS.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

Chapters two and three have exposed the situation of women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS. Some factors such as pervasive gender inequality, social systems of patriarchy, traditional practices that oppress women, silence over sexual issues, domestic violence, food shortages and other factors which lead to this vulnerability were discussed respectively. As a way to further explore how women are vulnerable to HIV and AIDS, fieldwork findings will be presented in this chapter. As its starting point, the researcher will explore how the research process and progress were carried out. The chapter will then develop into presenting the research findings. These findings will be discussed under two formats: First, the findings from unstructured interviews and then findings from focus group discussions. An analysis of each format will be provided, then the chapter will draw to its conclusion.

4.2 Research Overview

The issue of anonymity of the participants was a strong feature of the research and the consent form was arranged for participants to sign.¹⁵⁵ They were all given the choice to sign the consent form or to give verbal consent. Participants were allowed to withdraw at any point. They were promised that all answers were to be held in strict confidentiality, and that their names would not appear anywhere in any research report. The interviews took place at different places and different times. Because of the nature of the area of study, interviews were conducted in the local language of the interviewees (Shona). The sample size was relatively small, about twenty four respondents, with the purpose of limiting the generalizing of the data, although the findings are used to generalize the view of people on St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station's engagement with women living with HIV and AIDS. The field research provided the researcher with a remarkable opportunity to have contact with traditional leaders, community leaders, Church leaders and women living with HIV and AIDS in their social environment.

4.3 Methodology

4.3.1 Research Permission

The researcher contacted different leaders within the area of research. This was considered important, simply because these people are leaders of their organised communities who know about their people, their joys, problems, struggles and the history of their communities. As such, they are in a better position to give reliable information about their communities and can also bring people together for research project plans. Permission to do research was therefore sought from the following leaders:

Six traditional leaders (two chiefs, two headmen and two kraal heads) within the area of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station. Permission to do research was also sought from the Catholic Church authorities and these were the local Catholic Bishop of Gweru Diocese, the Catholic Priest In-Charge of St Alois Rural Mission Station, and the Parish Council of the Mission. Health and social community workers were also approached.

4.3.2 Study Population and Data Collection

The study was composed of 24 participants from the area of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station. The population was not limited to Catholic Christians only but open to any interested parties. Participants were divided into various groups; 2 traditional leaders, 4 community leaders, 4 Church leaders from the four outstations or parishes of St Alois Rural Mission Station, then 1 priest and 1 religious nun who both reside at St. Alois Mission Station. The last group was of women living with HIV and AIDS who are the main concern of this study.

The educational level for the group ranged from people with Honours degrees to those with very little education. Among traditional and Church leaders, one had an Honours degree, and another one a Diploma in Education. The other three held Ordinary Level certificates and the rest had only reached primary school level. The above mentioned groups were interviewed at different times and places. Traditional leaders were interviewed as individuals in their homesteads, community leaders were interviewed at their respective places of work or homes and the Church leaders were interviewed most preferably at their out-station parishes. The Priest-in-charge of St Alois and the assistant who is a religious nun were interviewed on a

¹⁵⁵ See Appendix A., pg 132.

one-to-one basis, and the interviews took place at St. Alois Mission Station. All these people were necessary in data collection as their contribution was important in influencing research plans and programming.

The fifth group was composed of women in St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station who are living with HIV and AIDS. For privacy and confidentiality, these women were informed of their meeting with the researcher by their health or social community workers. Their meeting with the researcher was held in a convenient and private place which they had suggested.

During focus group discussions, women living with HIV and AIDS were in groups of 4 and their total number was 12. All the interviews were conducted by the researcher in person.

4.3.3 Research Instruments

In obtaining data from field work, at least two methods were used as the main tools. These were unstructured interviews and focus group discussions. Data collection was based on qualitative techniques, focusing on drawing out participants' stories and experiences. Participants' response techniques were divided mainly into two formats, namely interviews and focus group discussions.

4.3.3.1 Interviews

Responses obtained in structured interviews usually tend to be short and sometimes superficial. As a way of avoiding this, unstructured interviews were used which are often called in-depth interviews. According to Fisher and Foreit (2002), in-depth interviews permit greater depth of meaning, detailed and open-ended responses to questions.¹⁵⁶ Unstructured interviews were conducted with 12 local leaders. Each of them was interviewed individually and all of these leaders were asked to consent either verbally or in written form before the interviews.

¹⁵⁶ A. A. Fisher and J. R. Foreit. 2002. *Designing HIV/AIDS Intervention Studies: An Operation Research Handbook*. New York: Horizons Frontiers, pg. 78.

A schedule of questions was developed to guide one-on-one interviews with participants,¹⁵⁷ with the central aim of drawing their position on the situation of women living with HIV and AIDS in their area. These interviews were informal. They varied in length from about twenty minutes to one and a half hours, depending on the circumstances. This means that the researcher had a series of questions that needed to be explored by soliciting the views, positions and opinions of the respondents. The choice of questions depended largely on the circumstances of the interview and the degree that the researcher wanted to pursue on particular issues or line of thought. This strategy entails establishing “a human-to-human relation with the respondent and the desire to understand rather than explain.”¹⁵⁸ Much of this understanding had to be negotiated in conversation with local traditional leaders, community leaders and Church leaders in the area of St Alois Rural Mission Station. The act of negotiation involved a very active engagement with interviewees in a mutually challenging encounter from which emerged meaning based on their experience within the limits of the study guide questions.

What I finally discovered was that interviews took more time than intended, particularly because the interviewees also had their own questions to ask, including some which were not in line with the research. This was a problem which the researcher encountered and was not prepared for.

Where it was possible, all the interviews were recorded and later transcribed into field notes. Some of the questions comprised the interviewees’ perceptions, opinions and assessments relating to the engagement of the Catholic Church of St Alois in the situation of HIV and AIDS, and the interest (if any) that the Church takes to address the problem of HIV and AIDS. In sensitive instances where the researcher could not take notes, only a mental record of the interviews was possible for later transcription into field notes. This corpus of recorded interviews forms an integral part of this research. It was also made clear to all interviewees that there were no right and wrong answers and therefore they could share their experiences freely.

¹⁵⁷ See Appendix B pg. 135.

¹⁵⁸ Andrea Fontana and James Frey, 1999. “The interview: From Structured Questions to Negotiated Text,” in N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, pg. 654.

4.3.3.2 Focus Group Discussions

Focus groups with up to twelve women living with HIV and AIDS were intended to bring respondents together in discussion groups that focused on a particular topic. The central aim was to draw testimonies and stories of respondents' experiences. Described by Blanche a focus group is typically a group of people who share a similar type of experience.¹⁵⁹ This method was best used during discussions with women who are living with HIV and AIDS as they also share similar types of experiences. The use of focus groups in the context of this study aimed at yielding detailed qualitative information from the respondents.

The discussion, therefore, will be presented as stories or testimonies. The principal concern is to ensure that whatever emerges in this research as theology of Church will, to an appreciative degree, derive from the process of paying attention as to how the Church acts in the situations under consideration and how its mission is perceived, especially by its members. This approach prioritizes the voices of those directly infected by HIV and AIDS and acknowledges their role as engendering new ways of envisaging the Church.

4.4 Data Analysis

Data collected from the respondents was analysed by comparing the responses with the literature review as discussed in chapter two to chapter three in this study. The analysis was based on the responses of the respondents under the following subheadings: Traditional and community leaders, Church leaders and Women living with HIV and AIDS.

4.5 Research Findings

4.5.1 Interviews with Traditional and Community Leaders

Asked about the situation of poverty and hunger in the area, one traditional chief expressed that the situation was bad and that it had become so difficult for him and his people to cope with the situation of hunger in particular. He said that many people in the area experienced lack of food over prolonged periods, which means that they are experiencing hunger and

¹⁵⁹ Martin Blanche, Kevin Durrheim and D. Painter, (eds). 2006. *Research in Practice: Applied Methods for Social Sciences*. Cape Town: UCT Press, pg 561.

deprivation. He expressed the point that the issue of hunger, for instance, has spread to almost all families including his own family.¹⁶⁰

The other traditional chief said that people are facing difficulties in getting food for their families. It used to be that when the country was struck by hunger, the government would distribute essential food stuffs to different places of the country so that people did not starve. He pointed out that for years now, the government has ceased to help people, even in terrible times like the situation that the country and his people are facing now. He appreciated the help that is being offered by the Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) and expressed that their efforts (NGOs) cannot be overlooked, although they cannot feed everyone in the community since the numbers of those starving is increasing at an alarming rate and therefore are not eligible for food assistance.¹⁶¹

Another key issue raised by both traditional chiefs during interviews is the fact that poverty has a strong element of deprivation, which leads to increases in frustration, and potentially to violence. They both agree to the fact that the current political instability cannot be understood outside hunger and poverty, simply because some politicians are promising people food if they support them. This, according to the traditional chiefs, has caused division among people and some people are even fighting over such promises. The traditional chiefs also expressed their worries about the increase in numbers of people who are getting sick, the increase in the death rate in the area and even the incidents of the political violence. At this point the traditional chiefs may have been referring to the increase of sickness as a result of hunger or HIV and AIDS.

One of the community leaders explained that hunger has reached crisis proportions to the extent that people have lost a sense of self-worth in order to survive. Because of extreme hunger, a good number of people in the community are resorting to desperate measures to

¹⁶⁰ Chief M. N, interview conducted by Theresa Mugwidi on 15 October 2009 in Silobela, St Alois Mission Station.

¹⁶¹ Chief X. M, interview conducted by Theresa Mugwidi on 17 October 2009 in Silobela, St Alois Mission Station.

find something to eat. They go about looking for wild fruits and even killing their dogs and cats for meat.¹⁶²

When asked which group among people in the community - meaning men, women, teenagers and children - feels the impact of poverty and hunger more than the others, community leaders stated clearly that women, by nature of being mothers to dependent children, feel the impact of hunger the most. This agrees with the research made by WARC that while both women and men often live in impoverished conditions, their experiences of poverty are different. Women's roles and responsibilities include taking care of all aspects of home life.¹⁶³

Asked what the community leaders would think can be done to help women living with HIV and AIDS to cope with the situation of poverty and hunger, a good number of them responded by showing no idea as to how such women could be assisted. One of the community leaders said that he is not even aware of women who are living with HIV and AIDS in the area. Two other community leaders shared the same view. One of the community leaders simply suggested that maybe the Church can help them in their problem of HIV and AIDS.

Asked what they think the government or the Church can do for them, they all suggested that the government should create projects for them such as gardens, carpentry, sewing, woodwork or any other projects that can help the communities. The community leaders also said the same thing suggesting that the Church of St Alois should also assist with creating projects for different groups.

4.5.2 Interviews with Church Leaders

4.5.2.1 Parish Lay Leaders

On the issue of poverty and hunger, the Church leaders expressed almost similar views as those expressed by the traditional and community leaders. They also said that poverty and

¹⁶² Community leader A. H. interview conducted by Theresa Mugwidi on 20 October 2009 in Silobela, St Alois Mission Station.

¹⁶³ World Alliance of Reformed Churches Researches. 2003. pg. 108.

hunger is threatening everybody's life in the area. Two of them shared that they feel that women are more vulnerable to hunger and poverty because of the nature of their responsibilities as mothers.

Asked what they think can be done to help women living with HIV and AIDS in their area to cope with the situation of poverty and hunger, they all indicated that they have not yet seen these women and would not suggest something for people who do not exist. By saying this, the parish leaders meant that they do not know of women living with HIV and AIDS in their parishes and therefore they cannot suggest anything. One of the parish leaders explained that all they see are women who look very thin and sickly and that no one would know if the women are suffering from HIV and AIDS or suffering from something else, perhaps hunger and starvation.

4.5.2.2 The Priest-In-Charge of St Alois Mission Station

Having been asked about the situation of poverty and hunger in the community in which they serve, the priest expressed that poverty and hunger are severe in the area. According to the report by the priest, women carry the heaviest burden of hunger, because most of the time they deny themselves food in order to give the little they may get to their dependent children and other family members like the elderly.

Asked about how the Church is engaged in the whole situation of poverty and hunger, he clearly confessed that the Church is not doing anything at the moment because there is also nothing to offer. The priest said:

As the Church, we are also stranded. We do not know how we can help people because even the Church itself is caught up in the same problem of hunger. I have personally applied for donations from well-wishers but I haven't got any reply and besides, the communication network is too poor. I either go to the nearest town to post letters or to make telephone calls but another bigger problem is the shortage of fuel to drive to any town close by. The worst thing is that sometimes starving orphans, elderly or any other people come here desperately looking for any help but still we offer them nothing. It pains me to see them in that state but there is nothing we can do. The Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are trying their level best to feed people but they cannot manage the whole community. It seems it is too much for them and as a result they are giving to a few desperate individual families while the rest are left to starve. The situation is bad and

frustrating and yet the Church cannot help at the moment. It is the Church's wish to help but from the way the situation is, it is not easy.¹⁶⁴

Asked if the Church has ever been engaged with women who are living with HIV and AIDS, the priest answered by saying that it is not easy to know who is HIV positive and therefore, not easy again to make any plans for people who are not known to the Church. He went on to say that even if they were known, still it would be difficult to do anything for them because as said earlier, the Church does not have anything to give to the poor or the starving. The only thing that the Church does at the moment is to simply preach the Gospel, encouraging people to continue to remain steadfast in prayer especially during this trying period.¹⁶⁵

Asked how the Church can be involved in self-sustaining projects if it happens that women living with HIV and AIDS commit themselves to start a project, the priest indicated that the Church will surely support and offer any possible help in developing the project. He said that the Church will do all it can to see to it that the project or projects are established.

After finishing with unstructured interviews, the researcher went on to meet the women who are living with HIV and AIDS in their respective area.

4.6 Focus Group Discussion Presentations

Presentations during FGD were based mainly on story-telling. The group was composed of women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station who are living with HIV and AIDS. Of the twelve women, seven stories were recorded. The other five could not be recorded, mainly because some of the women were not open to share their stories, and others refused to have their stories recorded or written down anywhere. Below are some the stories discussed in focus groups. Note that the names provided are not the true names of the respondents.

¹⁶⁴ Parish Priest B. M, interview conducted by Theresa Mugwidi on 25 October 2009 in Silobela, St Alois Mission Station.

¹⁶⁵ Parish Priest B. M, interview conducted by Theresa Mugwidi on 25 October 2009 in Silobela, St Alois Mission Station

Mitchelle Tichaona, a 27 year old mother of two children who knew her HIV status since 2006.

My husband got retrenched from his job in 2001. He came to stay in the rural area and we tried to do some farming to make a living but it was not easy because of frequent drought seasons. Besides, my husband had turned out to be sickly. We tried to send him to the nearest clinic but there seemed to be no improvement. Beginning of 2004, I also became sickly. I went to the clinic often but my health continued to deteriorate. The situation got worse every month and my husband died in February 2006. After his death, his relatives told me that they were not in a position to take care of my children and myself. With my health getting worse every time, I decided to go for an HIV test. I tested positive and knew I had to face it. I am not sure how the relatives of my husband discovered that I was HIV positive. With immediate effect, I was told to pack my personal belongings and leave. No matter how I tried to defend my children and myself, I had to leave. I left all the property that I and my husband had acquired during our staying together as husband and wife. After testing HIV positive, I still could not afford money to get ARVs from town. Up to this present day, I haven't managed to go to town and get the ARVs. I am sure some of my colleagues know how terrible I look during the days when I am worse. So I am enduring suffering without treatment. Right now I am staying with my father. My mother died when I was still in school and I am only grateful that my father is still alive, or I couldn't imagine how my life would be without him after having been sent away from my husband's family. I know now that I am positive but I cannot afford the bus fare to go to town to get the medication.

The above story is an explanation of how some people are still in denial as to the reality of HIV and AIDS. Instead of sympathising with a woman for having lost her husband, the family of the husband adds to the burden of the woman supporting her children all by herself. This already is a sign that even the children will not get proper education because the mother is too poor to even get the little money to go to town to get HIV and AIDS medication. In such a situation, the chances of children becoming orphans are high because their mother cannot afford to get the treatment. It is not surprising that such situations are common and do exist for some other women in the same area.

Respect Anderson, a woman of 33 years is a mother of five children aged 2, 5, 7, 9 and 13 and they are all girls. She tested positive in 2003. Her own father is late and she is now staying with her mother.

I got very sick at the beginning of 2003 and at that time I was seven months pregnant. I went for a pregnancy test only to discover that I was HIV positive. Meanwhile, my husband was dating another woman who was a divorcee. Though the two tried to keep it secret, their relationship gradually got exposed. Each time I tried to ask my husband about this relationship, I was silenced by beatings. Later on these beatings became my daily bread. Sometimes I was beaten in the presence of all my children. He always justified his behaviour by saying that I deserved the beatings because I could not produce male children for him. The relatives and people around did nothing to help the situation. I could see that our marriage was in danger of breaking up. The situation got worse each and every time. I decided to leave him and join my own family but this worsened the condition. The last beating terrified me. By this time my pregnancy was almost due. I could feel something terrible would happen to the unborn baby. A few days later, I had a miscarriage. I lost a lot of blood and became even too weak to serve my own children. Fortunately my mother came and asked that she take me along with her for some time, may be until I gain strength. The worry then was about my children. To go with them meant an extra burden to my mother, but again, to leave them was even worse. I battled with decision but was too weak to decide. I finally left them behind but with a wounded heart. A month later, my condition did not show signs of improvement yet I knew very well that my HIV status needed special attention but could not find it easy to disclose my status even to my own mother for fear of stigmatisation and discrimination. Besides, it was never going to be easy for me to go to the nearby town to get the ARVs. The deterioration of my health worried my mother and my other relatives. Fortunately a sister of mine is a nurse and so she talked to my mother said that I needed to go for HIV testing and it is only then that I revealed my status. Since then, I managed to start going for check-ups and now I am taking the ARVs and this has improved my situation. I am still staying with my mother and my children stay with their father except for the three year old little girl. My family is very much supportive. They have organised as family members to contribute as much as they can afford towards my health needs that includes money to go to the nearest town to get the ARVs supplies. My only worry at the moment is about my children whom I haven't seen for more than a year now. My husband has never allowed me to visit them and neither has he allowed them to visit me. I only hope all is well with them.

The story of Tendai reveals a reality which is still dominant in many families and societies. The birth of a boy child is ever welcomed by all members of the family while the birth of a girl child has very few family members rejoicing. If three to four children are all girls, the husband will be encouraged to marry another woman who can produce boy children for the family. The worst part of it is the fact that it is all blamed on the woman that a girl child is born. This attitude has had a lot of impact on women and girls. It has destroyed their self-esteem to the extent that in some families, girl children, for instance, do not feel as if they

belong to their families. As such, some husbands destroy their marriages in the name of looking for other women whom they can marry in order to get boy children. This sounds bad for those women whose marriages are in such a dilemma as that of Tendai.

Rutendo Chinjanja aged 27 is a married wife with three children and stays with her husband in the rural area.

Since I got married to my husband, we stayed in town together. The death of our seven months old baby worried both of us so much. The next child died again at the age of four months. We knew something was not right. My husband and I decided that we go for HIV test. We both tested positive. It was not easy to accept the results but I must thank God that we tried to understand and accept the reality that we were facing. We started taking ARVs for the first four to five months. My husband got more and more weak, so much so that he could not manage to continue working for the company that had employed him. We had to leave for the rural area because we could not afford paying the bills in town. The relatives of my husband started pressurising him to divorce me. My husband would not listen to them. I also saw no reason to leave my husband in that state. There was conflict in the family. Two years now, my husband is almost bed-ridden. The problem that I am now facing is that I cannot afford the bus fare to go back to town every month for ARVs supplies. Besides, it has been too difficult for him to take the tablets with an empty stomach because many times we do not have enough food. I am hoping that one day I will get money to go and get the tablets for him and for myself. At the moment, his own relatives are not even visiting him or offering any support towards his health. The burden is becoming heavier for me each and every time but I pray one day God will intervene.

The story of Rutendo is sad in that the situation is desperate in terms of health and finance. At the same time, the story is motivating in that both Rutendo and her husband both tested HIV positive but they remained committed to each other's love and in suffering. Thus, they share the burden of living in pain which many other marriages could not manage. The burden of poverty is something that cannot spare them especially now that they are staying in the rural area. This situation also shows that the future of their children is uncertain. That means that children are usually caught up in situations that they have no control over, which is sad.

Regina Shangwa is an 18 year old mother of a three-year old boy. She was tested for HIV and AIDS in 2002 and was found to be positive.

Before finishing my form two, thus when I was fourteen years old, I was forced into marriage with a man of sixty-three years. He already had three wives and a number of children. His second wife, who was my aunt, had died a mysterious death, it is said. My parents were left with no choice except to give me into marriage to the husband of my late aunt. I was told that it was within our culture that I had to be married to him so that I would take care of the children of my late aunt and also that I would have to continue bearing children for the husband of my aunt. I never wanted to go but nobody took my side. I left my family to join the third wife who had been sent away because she was accused of having caused the death of the other wife. The man himself was showing signs of sickness. He got seriously ill eleven months after my stay with him. I was eight months pregnant then when he died. I gave birth to a baby-girl who also died at the age of seven months. I never suspected AIDS as the cause of all these tragedies. My parents decided to take me back home. I immediately got so seriously ill that I never believed I would survive. I got admitted to a big hospital in town where I was advised to test for HIV and AIDS. The process of counselling helped me to accept the results which showed that I was HIV positive. The treatment I was given only lasted for a month and I was expected to come back to the same hospital during the following month for further assessment. My parents could not afford enough money for me to go back to the hospital. My condition deteriorated. I became weak and helpless. The local clinic did not have ARVs or any other substitute. The only thing for me to do was to wait for the day of the Lord. Four months after, a sister of mine managed to get some money for me to visit the hospital in town. It was a complicated case but I managed to get the ARVs. Since then, my health has improved. However, it is still not easy to access the medication because I cannot afford bus fare every month to go and get the medication, but what we have arranged is to get someone in town who can collect the medication from the hospital and give it to the bus driver at the end of every three months, and so far this plan has been working well. Right now I am still staying with my parents but I am planning to get married to a man who is really dying to marry me. He knows my status but he keeps insisting that he would want to take my hand in marriage.

In the above story, we see girls still suffering under the some cultural and traditional practices that have always oppressed the person called woman, in the name of culture. The death of her aunt left Regina with no option for decision making as regards to her own personal choice in married life. The family decides and forces her into marriage simply because the traditional practice expects that in the event of the death of a sister or aunt, a girl child from the family of the deceased will have to get married to the husband of the deceased. However, I also want to believe that given a free choice, the family itself would not in all honesty recommend this practice, but just because traditional practices need not be questioned, the family will have to let go of their daughter. In this era of HIV and AIDS, this becomes another factor that can

certainly fuel women's infection of HIV, hence increasing women's vulnerability to the pandemic. We also see in the same story that the issue of poverty continues to ravage the lives of the poor women who may be caught up in situation that they are not able to challenge..

Theresa Zhira is a 25 year old single mother. She was raped in 2007, got pregnant and later tested HIV positive. She stays with her mother

When I finished my form four, my uncle (brother to my mother) asked me to come and stay with him in town to help him look after his children since his wife had died. That was an opportunity for me to leave the rural area. I stayed with him in town for about seven months. One night he sneaked into my bedroom. I suspected nothing but wondered why he is doing such a strange act. He told me that he loved me very much and even tried to move closer to me in an effort to caress me. I screamed but he quickly silenced me and told me that he did not mean any harm. He left my bedroom but three days after, he came again and this time he did not give me chance to scream or think. He quickly closed my mouth with a material, pushed me onto the floor with my hands tied onto my back. He then forced himself in. I could not cry aloud because my mouth was completely covered with material. After he was satisfied he had done it; he threatened me with serious words. He told me he would kill me if ever I say a word of it to anyone. He even told me that I should never dare to leave his place or something terrible will happen to me. I got so terrified. I continued staying at his place for another two weeks and this time he was coming into my bedroom almost every night raping me while I said nothing. Each time he would threaten me with the same threatening words. After realising that my life was in danger, I simply sneaked away and went straight back to the villages. On arrival, my mother could read that there was something wrong with me. Without wasting time she sat me down to explain something to her. I did as it really happened. She kicked me out and promised that she would slaughter me if I ever said it again. She did not believe me. I had to keep it to myself or else I was going to be sent away from my own family. After having realised that I had missed my periods twice, I knew I was pregnant. My mother could also notice some physical changes on my body. She talked to me but this time she was much calm. I told her I was pregnant and that the only action for me was to take my life. She then begged that I stay with her and that she would discuss the matter with her brother but on very confidential grounds. Since then, my life has been miserable. When time was due for the birth, I gave birth to a baby boy who is now two years old and very sickly. The health of my son made me decide on going for an HIV test. I tested positive but I am still feeling strong though I know the time is soon to come for me to be sick. I was hurt by my uncle and I also was hurt by my mother who did not listen to my problem.

Theresa shared a story which most people would not find easy to believe. This story remains locked up in herself because it sounds shameful to her and even to anyone who might hear it.

This means that Theresa will live with the trauma and the memories that surround her experience. She will not forget the incidents that were accompanied by terror and pain. Theresa faces a dilemma; she cannot name the father of the child. Her life has been ruined. She has no further education, no job, so she has no income at all. She is surely facing criticism and rejection from other family members because she is not officially married. The story reveals a certain truth about how women and girls can be abused with nobody coming to their rescue. In this age of HIV and AIDS, such abuse makes women and girls vulnerable to HIV infection because it means that a woman is someone who can be raped at home, at work or on the street. This leaves women with a fear of insecurity. Innocent girls end up in situations that are life threatening as we have seen in the narration of the above story.

Juliet Chitsvuku aged 38 is a mother of two sets of twin-girl children aged 10 and 14.

After five years of marriage, my husband died of HIV and AIDS. Within limits of time, I found myself in the village court. The purpose of the court was to find the person responsible for my husband's death. Without clear fundamental basis and witnesses, the relatives of my husband accused me of bewitching him. I was dumb-founded and could not speak. I trembled in that trauma and wished that any of my own relatives could be present to support and speak for me. After the dismissal of the court, there I was in the midst of the villagers. I became the topic of the village. Who shall I turn to besides my four children? I felt rejected. Three days after, I woke up early morning only to find that there was a branch of a certain type of tree called *chizuzu* on the doorstep. In the Shona culture, this depicts that one is a witch. I knew I was meant to leave with immediate effect. Without choice, I left my husband's home; I left all the property for I was never allowed to take along anything. I therefore looked for a relative of mine to stay with. I only had one blood brother and two blood sisters who had already died some years back. My parents both died when we were very young and we had to be under the custody of a grandmother. Life has never been easy since the death of my husband. Where I am staying, I am expected to contribute money or food but it is too difficult for me. I am always told to leave the place if I cannot make any contributions. I wish I could get a job somewhere in town so that I will be able to look after my children.

The story of Juliet is a true revelation of how some African societies are still holding onto the idea that witchcraft is a business for women. Thus in African societies and in particular for people in the area of St Alois, belief in witchcraft is still strong and women are forever blamed for any calamities in the community especially deaths and sicknesses. This story also explains how people of St Alois area are far from understanding HIV and AIDS. Therefore

life will never be easy for women as long as their own families continue to blame them for the death crisis in families. Juliet was also denied the property of her husband because she had no son to inherit. She was blamed for her husband's death and rejected by all family members.

Brenda Bhangiwa is a young woman aged 24. She discovered that she was HIV positive when her husband died after five years of their marriage. Brenda has two children aged six and four. She is a teacher at a local school and after she discovered her HIV status, she decided to go public and talk about her HIV and AIDS status. In her words of encouragement to other women she said:

Women, I think it is time now that we open up and talk about our HIV status. This is the only way that can save us from being silenced and threatened by our own people. We need to share our problems amongst ourselves and allow people to know about our HIV and AIDS status. We will never get help as long as we remain silent. We need to start our own lives and we need the support from any well-wisher so that we can stand on our own feet. There are organisations in towns that assist people living with HIV and AIDS but if we do not make ourselves known, then we will never get any help. We only need courage to talk about our status then we are free.

Brenda proves to be a courageous woman in that she encourages other women to open up and talk about their HIV status. She is one of the enlightened people who do not feel ashamed of her own status. She is, therefore, the hope of the group in making the other members remain strong in this trying time of HIV and AIDS. I think if she also gets support from the church or other people, she can be a pillar of strength to those women who are not yet ready to stand up to the shame of being known as an HIV and AIDS patient.

After finishing with focus group discussions, the researcher brought the whole group together to share openly about what they thought could be the way forward, basing the discussions on some of their experiences in society, in Church and in their own families. The main aim was to draw from them what they think the Church could do to be of help to them as women living with HIV and AIDS.

Large Group Discussions

This gathering for the large group was done on the last day of the focus group presentations. It was organised like a farewell celebration. It was a two-hour programme with one of the women chairing the discussions. While the purpose was to celebrate our togetherness, the main purpose behind it was for the researcher to gather the whole group and discuss ideas that could lead to a way forward for that particular group. The first hour was committed to discussions on the way forward and then the second hour was committed to celebrating the time spent together with a simple meal which was prepared by the women themselves.

Suggestions for a Way Forward

Having asked what women of St Alois who are living with HIV and AIDS thought should be done by the Church of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station in helping them to cope with their situation of HIV and AIDS, the following points were raised:

- That the Church of St Alois should provide them with food and other basic needs.
- That the Church should provide ground for them to start a project.
- That the Church should start a project for them.
- That the Church should provide a room for them that can serve as an office where they can hold their meetings.
- That the Church should encourage women living with HIV and AIDS to come together and form an official group.
- That the Church should gather men and explain to them that women also deserve their own rights as people created in the image of God.

From these points, I noticed that women of St Alois who are living with HIV and AIDS believe that the Church has everything that can help them and that the Church can do everything for them. This concept can be traced back to the times when the Church, in general, used to provide its people with basic needs that included food and clothes. This is the

time when missionaries came to the then Rhodesia for evangelism. Missionaries were known for providing Christians or converts with basic needs. From some of the comments, one woman reminded the group that the Church used to give clothes and other necessary gifts so it could continue its responsibilities of caring for the poor and the needy. The discussions ended with a prayer of thanksgiving and we wished each other well and then parted.

4.7 Analysis of Unstructured Interview Findings

An analysis of the interviews indicated that almost all interviewees spoke about the extent to which poverty and hunger have crippled their existence. What emerged from the interviews was the overwhelming evidence that poverty in the area is about an ongoing struggle with starvation and lack of resources for people to improve their own situation. Both traditional and community leaders testified that people in their communities are unable to feed themselves and their children. As a result, chronic hunger has become a daily reality that leads to desperation and even serious crime.

One of the key messages that came out was the need, not only for women who are living with HIV and AIDS but for all the households living in extreme poverty, to have projects started for them as a way of trying to get sources of income. There is also a general consensus from the research findings that women carry the heaviest burden of poverty and hunger and therefore are more vulnerable in the crisis that the area is facing. The unstructured interviews conducted did not say much about the situation of women living with HIV and AIDS. This somehow indicates the community's lack of proper knowledge about HIV and AIDS. This may also be a sign that St Alois Mission, being in the remote area, has not yet received enough education on HIV and AIDS. Thus people are not fully aware of the presence and consequences of HIV amongst themselves. If this is the case, it means that it is difficult to talk of reducing the spread of HIV in the area.

4.8 Analysis of Focus Group Discussions

Testimonies shared during focus group discussions show that women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station who are living with HIV and AIDS are in impossible situations. Those who managed to share their stories portrayed the reality of how women are vulnerable to a number of factors especially in this era of HIV and AIDS. Some of the stories shared during

FGD show that a significant number of women living with HIV and AIDS are not receiving treatment. They cannot afford to get bus fare to go and get ARVs from the nearest town. Those few who can manage to get treatment also indicated that they have stopped taking treatment because they do not have enough food to eat. By the very nature of ARVs, users need to have an adequate food supply to counter the adverse effects of the drug. This is one of the ways in which poverty has far-reaching consequences for the people affected. The effects of lack of food on HIV treatment extend beyond this.

One of the women indicated that despite what people may think and say about them, she is no longer ashamed to talk about her HIV status. This also indicates a shift from a society largely characterised by stigma to a society that readily understands their HIV status. It is also a sign that people who are infected are gradually beginning to understand HIV and AIDS as a disease that can be lived with just like any other chronic disease.

Analysing some of the stories shared by women living with HIV and AIDS, I tend to agree with Mwaura (2008) who argues that, “Women’s experience of stigma and discrimination is increased when they are divorced or separated from their partners on account of their status.”¹⁶⁶ Thus, after having tested HIV positive, women do experience discrimination and sometimes they are even accused of bringing the disease into the family. They are divorced on the grounds that they are the ones who are blamed for bringing the HIV and AIDS into the family. Some of the discussions also indicated that there are some people who still do not believe that HIV and AIDS exists. Thus, HIV and AIDS incidents are still viewed as a result of witchcraft as we have seen in focus group discussions. This implies that the control and or cure of HIV and AIDS will be difficult and the ongoing fuelling of the disease will have no control. However, as we have seen from some individuals’ testimonies, there are also some women whose husbands work hand in hand with them, even in such difficult times like an HIV crisis. This is also encouraging and it is such stories that women with HIV and AIDS would also want to hear rather than depressing stories all the time.

¹⁶⁶ Philomena N. Mwaura. 2008. Violation of Human Rights of Kenyan Women with HIV and AIDS through Stigma and Discrimination, in Hinga, T.M., Kubai, A.N., Mwaura, P. and Ayanga, H. *Women, Religion and HIV and AIDS in Africa: Responding to Ethical and Theological Challenges*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, pg. 133.

Analyzing the discussions that were held by the big group, we can see that women of St Alois are expecting the Church to do everything for them. They do not seem to see themselves as part of any program that can lead to any development of their own lives. It has to be the Church doing it for them. This attitude needs to be rectified.

What is the solution for the problem of such assumptions?

If the Church would honestly have money and decide to start a project for women living with HIV and AIDS, it would remain the project of the Church because it means that these women would not have any ownership in the project and, therefore, would remain spectators and never participants and goal owners. Besides, the project would function successfully only as long as the Church was willing to commit its money, material or buildings to the project. This implies that women need to fully participate in the process of building any project and only then can they perceive it as their project. The saying “do not give a fish, but give a fishing rod”, therefore, fits well.

What then would be the better way of survival for HIV positive women of St Alois Mission?

The suggestion would be that women themselves get liberated from the mindset that the Church should do it for them, and that they also get liberated from all forms of dependency. Women therefore need to be empowered and capacitated in a way that enables them to fend for themselves and detach themselves from dependency syndrome. By so doing, women living with HIV and AIDS will start looking at their lives with hope and courage.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter has provided different views as to how different groups of people view the situation of women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station who are living with HIV and AIDS. Findings from the interviews conducted by the researcher were presented and analysed respectively. Although unstructured interviews did not clearly state how women are vulnerable to HIV and AIDS, focus group discussions in the form of story-telling were a clear presentation of how women of St Alois are vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. An analysis of the presentations demonstrated that women of St Alois Mission would need to be liberated from their situation and that they also need to be empowered in order for them to be self-sustaining

and self-reliant. Therefore, a theoretical framework in response to women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ENGAGEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH WITH WOMEN WHO ARE LIVING WITH HIV AND AIDS

5.1 Introduction

Chapter four discussed the findings of the study which were informed by the qualitative form of methodology. Some of the findings confirmed how women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station are vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. The findings confirmed how some of the factors discussed in chapter two, such as stigma and discrimination, gender inequality, culture and religion, domestic violence, patriarchy, silence and sexuality are responsible for the fuelling of HIV and AIDS to women. The factors directly or indirectly featured during the focus group discussions as factors that contribute to women's vulnerability to HIV and AIDS. The misconception of gender plays a role against women's value as people created in the image of God. With poverty increasingly ravaging the country, the findings also indicated how the effects of Fast Track Land Reform Programme have negatively impacted on women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station, thus, how they are experiencing the current hunger from poverty.

The purpose of this chapter is to look into the engagement of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station with women who are living in the context of factors mentioned above, as well as in the context of HIV and AIDS. In an attempt to give reasons why the Church of St Alois needs to be engaged with HIV positive women, the chapter will build its argument based on three significant biblical events. These include the Exodus event that reveals the justice of God for the poor people, the mission of the prophets, a mission for the poor and the mission of Jesus. An assessment of how the Church can exercise its pastoral mission in the context of women living with HIV and AIDS will then be discussed.

5.2 The Poor and Oppressed: A Cause for Concern in the Old Testament

5.2.1 God of Justice in the Exodus event

The God of justice can best be understood in relation to the Exodus event (Exodus chapters 13 to 15). According to Folk (1991), the Exodus event is seen by many Christian and Jewish scholars as the central event through which God is revealed in the Old Testament.¹⁶⁷ Jean Cardonnel in Folk (1991) therefore asserts that,

¹⁶⁷ Jerry Folk. 1991. *Doing Theology, Doing Justice*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, pg. 70.

The specific character of the one and only God is the fact that he intervenes in the very midst of abandonment and dereliction. His divine revelation begins with the liberation of the most oppressed and tortured people who thereby move prophetically from oppression to liberation.¹⁶⁸

The Exodus event takes place during the time when the Israelites were under the harsh rule of Pharaoh in Egypt. God is seen intervening for the oppressed Israelites. Walter Brueggemann (1976) expresses the action of Yahweh in rescuing the Israelites by asserting that Yahweh steps into the brickyard and says, “Let my people go!” whereas the gods of Egypt say, “Make more bricks.”¹⁶⁹ Israel, groaning in slavery, cried out to Yahweh for help, and on hearing their cry Yahweh remembered the promises he made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.¹⁷⁰ As such, Yahweh’s response to the cry of the people of Israel is shown through Moses. Speaking to Moses, Yahweh said: “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt, I have heard them crying for help on account of their taskmasters.”¹⁷¹ Commissioning Moses, Yahweh says, “Yes indeed, the cry of the Israelites for help has reached me, and I have also seen the cruel way in which the Egyptians are oppressing them. So I am sending you to Pharaoh for you to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”¹⁷² From this background, we see Yahweh using Moses as an instrument to liberate the Israelites. Thus, God is seen coming to the aid of the oppressed. Miranda (1977) indeed notes, “God’s intervention in history has only one purpose - to serve the cause of justice, to save from injustice.”¹⁷³ As such, Folk (1990) states that:

An increasing number of biblical scholars and theologians insist that the Exodus reveals Yahweh as a God who was allied not with the rulers of the society but with the poor and oppressed. Yahweh is the God whose ears and heart are open to the cries of the oppressed and who intervenes on their behalf.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁸ Jean Cardonnel. 1991. *L’Homme chretien et l’homme marxiste*, in J. Folk, *Doing Theology, Doing Justice*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, pg. 71.

¹⁶⁹ Walter Brueggemann. 1976. *Living Toward a Vision*. New York: United Church Press, pg. 56.

¹⁷⁰ Exodus 2:23-25.

¹⁷¹ Exodus 3:7

¹⁷² Exodus 3: 9-10.

¹⁷³ Miranda Pillay. 1977. *Marx and the Bible: Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression*. London: SCM Press, pg. 78.

¹⁷⁴ Jerry Folk. 1991, pg. 70.

This implies that the Exodus event reveals Yahweh's divine revelation, which begins with the liberation of the oppressed and tortured Israelites. Furthermore, Orobator (2005) comments that,

Many liberation theologians argue that God makes the original option for the poor and oppressed people in the exodus event, which theme the prophets forcefully re-echoed, the psalmists lyrically celebrated and the wisdom literature poetically enacted. The option is further concretised by Jesus when he proclaims the good news to the poor (Lk 7:22), and announces their liberation from bondage as the cornerstone of his salvific mission (Lk 4:18-19).¹⁷⁵

Additionally, Mlilo (2007) says, "The Exodus affirms among other things that Yahweh is true Redeemer from injustice and oppression, the great Liberator before whom no earthly power or even the mighty forces of nature can stand."¹⁷⁶

5.2.2 The Significance of the Exodus Event to the People of Israel

The Exodus event played a central role in the history of the Israelites. According to Mlilo (2007),

This was the fundamental experience, the defining moment for the Israelites as a nation. It was the cornerstone of their national identity and pride. For the people of Israel, therefore, the Exodus had both a political as well as a religious significance. In both spheres, the Exodus was Israel's referral point of departure as well as the interpretation of current events and the projection of all future hopes.¹⁷⁷

The same view is shared by Orobator (2005) when he says, "Most liberation theologians adopt the Old Testament's account and theology of the Exodus from slavery in Egypt to the promised land and the constitution of Israel as a nation as their point of departure."¹⁷⁸ This implies therefore that the Exodus event created a bond of special relationship between the people of Israel and Yahweh. This relationship was mainly based on Yahweh's action of liberation from Pharaoh's oppression.

¹⁷⁵ Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator. (2005). pg. 208.

¹⁷⁶ Luke G. Mlilo 2007. *I have Seen and I have Heard: An Introduction to the Book of Exodus*. St Joseph's Theological Institute: Cedara, (unpublished), pg. 4.

¹⁷⁷ Luke G. Mlilo. 2007. pg. 5.

¹⁷⁸ Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator. 2005, pg. 208.

5.2.3 The Significance of the Exodus Event for the Christian Church

The Exodus is significant not only to the Jewish people but for Christians as well. The significance of the Exodus event can be applied to various interpretations of the human condition that calls for liberation from bondage. Mlilo has this to say,

The events leading to the Exodus experience are a fundamental element of Christian belief: for example the association, among other aspects of Jesus' redemptive death with the Passover meal that preceded freedom from slavery. Indeed, the Eucharistic Theology of Christianity makes 'sense' only in relation to the Exodus event.¹⁷⁹

What it implies in this regard is the fact that God's response to the cry of the oppressed and taking their side forms the basis of the theology of liberation. Thus, the significance of the Exodus event becomes the motive for the Christian Church to take upon itself the commitment to liberate the people of God who may be found in any form of oppression.

Thus, in this age of HIV and AIDS, the same God who intervened on behalf of the Israelites continues to intervene on behalf of those who find themselves vulnerable to HIV. Therefore, God enters into partnership with humans in the act of saving them. Expressing the role of God in the time of HIV and AIDS, Dibeela says, "God continues to be interested in the plight of the people of the world who suffer injustices. Most of these people are in the Third World, and they suffer at the hands of globalisation and the elite in the West."¹⁸⁰ In the context of this study, therefore, St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station is called to make efforts in applying possible strategies for liberating its own women parishioners, who are living with HIV and AIDS from the burdens that make them most vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. Thus, the Church of St Alois is challenged to look around and identify different forms of slavery in its community and be the 'Moses', by becoming a bridge-builder and instrument through which liberation in its various forms can be attained.

We shall also see how the revelation of God's concern for the poor and oppressed continues to be manifested by the prophets of the 8th century.

¹⁷⁹ Luke G. Mlilo. 2007. pg. 6.

¹⁸⁰ Moiserale P. Dibeela. 2003. "International Justice", in Musa W. Dube (ed), *Africa Praying: A Handbook on HIV/AIDS Sensitive Sermon Guidelines and Liturgy*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, pp. 259-260.

5.3 The Poor and Oppressed: A Cause for Concern for the 8th Century Prophets

5.3.1 The Mission of the Prophets

With so much information by different scholars confirming the role of prophets of the 8th Century as one of concern for the poor and the oppressed, we shall not go into details about each prophet or about their functions. The purpose of this section and in the context of this study is simply to give a general impressionistic sketch of the prophetic role that present the prophets' primary concern for the poor of their time.

In the Old Testament, and especially the prophets of the 8th century, Mlilo (2007) argues that "Prophets were especially active during the period of Monarchy in Israel, or during periods when socio-economic and political upheavals, when there were great social and political abuses of the poor, the widows, orphans, and socially/politically marginalised people."¹⁸¹ Indeed, this agrees with what Anderson (1978) says "...the prophets were concerned primarily with the people, especially those who were victims of the power structure of society, the "nobodies" whom everybody but the God of Israel had forgotten."¹⁸² Furthermore, Hayes (1974) says, "as a rule, the prophets sided with the oppressed of Israelite society and in the name and the word of Yahweh, attacked the social structures that produced such social and economic inequalities."¹⁸³ Similarly, Clines (1978) says, "Their message insisted on justice", as he holds that prophets "attacked the evil of the society and predicted doom."¹⁸⁴ To stress the point, Bellagamba (1992) argues,

The prophets experienced the oppression and injustices perpetuated by the powerful and rich over the people, and felt that the people could not perceive Yahweh's liberating freedom under those circumstances. Consequently, they saw their mission as one of liberation through conscientisation and empowerment of people. The process of conscientisation was made possible by the teachings of the prophets, and the empowerment was based on the power of Yahweh.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Luke G. Mlilo. 2007. pg. 25.

¹⁸² B.W. Anderson. 1978. *The Eighth Century Prophets*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, pg. 6.

¹⁸³ John H. Hayes. 1974. *Introduction to the Bible*. Philadelphia: Westminster, pg. 161.

¹⁸⁴ David Clines. 1978. "Religion and Worship in the Bible", in Pat Alexander (ed), *The Lion Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Herts UK, Lion., pg. 130.

¹⁸⁵ Anthony Bellagamba. 1992. *Mission and Ministry in the Global Church*. New York: Orbis Books, pg. 54.

In addressing their message to the concrete situations in which they found themselves, Mlilo (2007) notes, “The prophets proved to be astute social critics. They were accurate analysts of the religious, social and political contexts in which they lived.”¹⁸⁶ As such, the prophets saw the poor as a direct result of the behaviour of the elite. This implies that they denied every injustice which manifested the absence of justice. Houston (2006) provides a list of the most significant passages in the prophets denouncing social injustice and these are:

Isaiah 1:21-26; 3:13-15; 5:1-7, 8-10; 10:1-4; 58:1-12

Jeremiah 2:34; 5:20-29; 7:1-7; 22:13-19; 34:8-22

Ezekiel 22:1-16, 23-31; 34:1-31

Amos 2:6-16; 3:9-15; 4:1-3; 5:10-12, 8:4-7

Micah 2:1-5, 6-11; 3:1-4, 9-12.¹⁸⁷

Among those prophets who were open to challenging the injustices towards the poor, “Amos was the champion of the cause for the poor and disadvantaged.”¹⁸⁸ His criticism of the situation was forceful and severe.¹⁸⁹ He even described Israel’s coming fate in blood-chilling details.¹⁹⁰ In the light of the above quotations, we can see that the prophets never tolerated injustice towards the poor.

5.3.2 The Significance of the Message of the Prophets for the Contemporary Church

From what we have already discussed, we can notice that the prophets always responded to a situation that needed to be put right, for example the situation of injustice towards the poor and the oppressed. The prophets were in touch with what was going on and, therefore, were critical analysts. Therefore the Church’s mission is not only similar to that of Moses, but it also signifies the vocation of the prophets which focuses on the poor and oppressed.

¹⁸⁶ Luke G. Mlilo. 2007. pg. 28.

¹⁸⁷ Walter J. Houston. 2006. *Contending for Justice: Ideologies and Theologies of Social Justice in the Old Testament*. New York: T & T Clark., pg. 74-75.

¹⁸⁸ Luke G. Mlilo. 2007. *A Man of Strife and Contention: An Introduction to the Prophet Jeremiah*. St. Joseph’s Theological Institute: Cedara, (unpublished), pg. 16

¹⁸⁹ See Amos 2:6-16; 4:1-3; 6:4-7.

¹⁹⁰ See Amos 6: 9-11; 7:17.

Turning to Palma's (1996) definition of a prophet in our present time, she holds that, "prophets are messengers of God in times of crisis", who "speak in the midst of concrete history of a people struggling for liberation and life."¹⁹¹ Perhaps Palma best captures the role of prophets by holding that,

Prophecy proclaims abundant life for the marginalised and excluded in the context of our own experience and in light of our faith, by being open to the Spirit who calls us to discern the times, to denounce all that destroys life, and to proclaim God's new creation for women and men.¹⁹²

In the context of this study, I find Palma's definition quite applicable and instructive, in the sense that being prophetic means being open to the Spirit who calls us to discern and denounce all the injustices that destroys life. Thus in the era of HIV and AIDS and in the focus of this study, St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station is challenged to be prophetic in denouncing the negative impact of culture, traditions and religious beliefs and practices, especially those discussed in chapter two, which perpetuate the low status of women. Just as "the prophets saw the hand of Yahweh in the historical and political events of their day,"¹⁹³ St Alois Mission needs also to see the hand of God in its efforts in initiating new meaning of HIV and AIDS to its women who are infected by HIV. That means, the prophetic ministry of the Church is not a call to passivity or silence in the face of oppression, deprivation, dispossession and exploitation of human beings against each other. Chitando (2009) affirms Dube's challenge of the role of the Church as a prophet in a time of HIV and AIDS. He says,

For Dube, there is an urgent need for prophetic action in the era of HIV. Prophets insisted on justice, preached hope and assumed the role of teachers. In the face of HIV in Africa, there is need for prophetic action that exposes death-dealing practices in the Church and African cultures. A prophetic Church that follows the example of eighth-century Israelite prophets and Jesus denounces injustice and promotes life.¹⁹⁴

In order for the Church to fulfil this function, it has to understand God's will especially on issues of justice.

¹⁹¹ Martha Palma. 1996. "Prophecy, Women's Church", in Letty Russell and Shannon Clarkson (eds), *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*. Louisville, Westminster John Knox., pg. 228.

¹⁹² Martha Palma. 1996, pg. 228.

¹⁹³ Luke Mlilo. 2007. *A Man of Strife and Contention*., pg. 17.

¹⁹⁴ Ezra Chitando. 2009. *Troubled But Not Destroyed*. Geneva: WCC Publications, pg. 62.

5.4 The Poor and Oppressed: A Cause for Concern in the New Testament

5.4.1 Jesus' Mission

At the heart of Jesus' message about the Kingdom of God was concern for the poor, socially marginalised and outcasts groups. As stated by Segundo in Folk (1991), "... Jesus' vision of the Kingdom is good news for the poor and all the oppressed and marginalised groups."¹⁹⁵ Indeed, Segundo (1985) notes that, "Jesus' miracles for the most part were performed for the benefit of the poor."¹⁹⁶ This finds support in Bosch (1998) who states,

Jesus reached out to all people - the poor, blind and hungry, those with leprosy, those who weep and mourn; sinners, tax-collectors, captives and prostitutes; the demon possessed and persecuted; the 'little ones', the last and the least.¹⁹⁷

It is, therefore, important at this point to mention that Jesus' concern for the poor was not something new. As we have already discussed, it can be traced as far back to the history of salvation in the Old Testament where the Exodus event gives us a clear example of how Yahweh revealed his love for the oppressed Israelites, and how Yahweh liberated them.

Expressing the relationship between Jesus and the poor people of his time, Sanders (1985) says that the crowds surrounding him and who hung on his every word probably included a disproportionate number of the poor.¹⁹⁸ This is advanced by Folk (1991) in the following words: "According to the Gospels, the poor and other socially marginalised and outcast groups were especially attracted to Jesus and his vision of the Kingdom."¹⁹⁹ Among those labelled marginalised, women were most definitely one of the marginalised groups in Jesus' day along with the poor, the sick, tax collectors, public sinners and Gentiles. Folk (1991) says, "He reached out to the excluded women, the poor, the handicapped, the ritually unclean, lepers and other diseased persons, children and foreigners."²⁰⁰ Dube (2003) advances this

¹⁹⁵ Jerry Folk. 1991, pg. 101.

¹⁹⁶ J.L. Segundo. 1985. *The Historical Jesus of the Synoptics*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books., pg. 211.

¹⁹⁷ David Bosch. 1991 *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. New York: Orbis Books, pg. 27.

¹⁹⁸ E.P. Sanders. 1985. *Jesus and Judaism*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, pg. 164.

¹⁹⁹ Jerry Folk. 1991, pg. 103.

²⁰⁰ Jerry Folk. 1991, pg. 118.

observation by expanding Jesus' concern for women as one of the groups that was considered as less than human beings. She asserts that,

Jesus' association with the less privileged is also evident in his relationship with women. Women of his time and society, as in most of our societies, were denied economic, decision-making, leadership and legal power on the basis of their gender. Jesus began to fight for gender justice by befriending women (John 11), allowing them to follow him (Luke 8:1-3), allowing the unclean bleeding women to touch him (Mark 5:24-34), sending them to preach (John 4:39-42), 20:11), thus giving them public leadership roles. He also insisted that law should apply to and protect both women and men (John 8:1-11).²⁰¹

Thus, Segundo notes that, "Jesus profoundly challenged the morals and taboos of his society regarding the place of women and the relationship between men and women."²⁰² To this, Nasimiyu-Wasike (1996) says, "In his teaching and relationships, Jesus recognised women as persons in their own right and disapproved of anything that discriminated against women."²⁰³ This finds support in Swidler (1979) when he says, "Jesus often used women as central figures in his stories and sayings, always in a positive way."²⁰⁴

Therefore, the above citations show that Jesus was emphasising the full humanity of women. Folk (1991) correctly observes,

Jesus' frequent use of women as central figures in his teaching points to the fact that in the kingdom that is now at hand, patriarchal social structures will be overcome and true mutuality will prevail between the sexes.²⁰⁵

Jesus' concern for the poor can best be understood when we read a passage from the Gospel of Luke in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. When he stood up to read the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, he unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

²⁰¹ Musa Dube. 2003. "The Prophetic Method in the New Testament", in Musa Dube (ed), *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*. Geneva: WCC Publications, pg. 51.

²⁰² J.L. Segundo. 1985, pg. 104.

²⁰³ Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike. 1991, pg. 74.

²⁰⁴ Leonard Swidler. 1979. *Biblical Affirmations of Women*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press., pg. 164.

²⁰⁵ Jerry Folk. 1991, pg. 104.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim release to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.²⁰⁶

The above scripture passage confirms Jesus' prophetic agenda. The passage highlights Jesus' dedication to his ministry that includes challenging social injustice by pronouncing liberation to the poor, the captives and the sick. By proclaiming the year of the Lord's favour, Jesus is at the same time announcing hope to the hopeless.

In view of the above, we can see that Jesus' Gospel of liberation was Good News for the marginalised and this Good News was a true sign of the presence of the Kingdom of God which Jesus saw as the transformation of the old social order which was oppressive. In this regard, Jesus' understanding of the Kingdom of God was shaped by the social, economic, religious and political situation of that particular time. According to Folk's interpretation of Jesus' message of the Kingdom, "God's reign is breaking forth here and now, overthrowing oppressive religious and political oligarchies and social orders and establishing a new community of mutuality and solidarity in the midst of the old."²⁰⁷ The message of Jesus from Folk's interpretation clearly shows how Jesus was fighting the oppressive and dominant religious and political structures of his time. He called for fundamental change in people's attitude and actions especially towards the poor. Thus, Jesus' focus on the marginalised groups motivates the Church's understanding of the situation of the poor and oppressed of its time, hence making an impact on the Church's pastoral approach to vulnerable groups.

5.4.2 The Church and *Missio Dei*

The mission of the Church is derived from the mission of God (*Missio Dei*). Udayakuma in Athyal and Yoder (eds) (1998) says: "The Church has no mission separate from God's mission (*Missio Dei*)."²⁰⁸ The mission of the Church, therefore, is derived from God's act of sending Jesus into the world to proclaim the Good news of the Kingdom of God. Its mission is to participate as an agent of God in ministering to the world. As Bosch puts it: "The *Missio Dei* is God's activity, which embraces both the Church and the world, and in which the

²⁰⁶ Luke 4:16-19.

²⁰⁷ Jerry Folk. 1991, pg. 95.

²⁰⁸ Athyal, A.P. Nyce, D.Y (eds). 1998. *Mission Today: Challenges and Concerns*. Chennai: Gurukul

Church may be privileged to participate”.²⁰⁹ The Church in this respect is called to bear witness to God’s love through its life and activities. Orobator (2005) places the mission of the Church within the framework of a society. He argues that the character of the Church is to play certain observable roles relative to specific issues of social concern.²¹⁰ According to Orobator, “HIV and AIDS, refugees and poverty are burning issues in the present moment of the continent’s traumatized political and socio-economic history. A church that opts to engage these issues automatically emerges as a Church on mission – *from crisis to kairos*.”²¹¹ Thus the Church is called to respond to the plight of the poor.

5.4.3 The Church’s Mission: A Mission for the Poor

From the understanding of the *Missio Dei*, it makes sense that the mission of the Church is informed by a theological motivation derived from the Exodus Event, which indicates the locus of God’s act of liberation. The mission of the Church is also derived from the mission of the prophets. Above all, its mission is derived from and in a sense continuous with the mission of Jesus, “As the Father has sent me so I am sending you.”²¹² Central to all this is the focus on the liberation of the oppressed. In the context of this background, the mission of the St Alois Catholic Church therefore is:

Helping people who are unjustly treated, persecuted, oppressed by internal and external forces, to liberate themselves, to experience the liberation, the salvation and redemption brought to all by Christ. Since nobody can truly experience salvation and redemption unless they are totally free from enslaving forces, mission is the means to help people achieve this liberation and redemption which is given by God in Christ. Without this experience in our lives, the liberation of Christ remains an illusion. Only through mission as liberation can the redemption and salvation of Christ be effective in people’s lives and be meaningful in their existence.²¹³

This implies that the mission of the Church is about liberating the captives and also about helping the troubled to attain the salvation of Christ by bringing Christ into the lives of the suffering.

Theological College and Research Institute, pg. 9.

²⁰⁹ David J. Bosch. 1991, pg. 391.

²¹⁰ Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator. 2005, pg. 14.

²¹¹ Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator. 2005, pg. 18.

²¹² See John 20:21

²¹³ Anthony Bellagamba. 1992, pg. 53.

Thus, as pointed out by Orobator (2005),

Because God has opted for the poor, the Church of God must follow suit and actualise this option historically. This divine precedent is paralleled by the mystery of the incarnation. The incarnation happens in poverty: the poor Messiah takes on the condition of and sets an unavoidable example for the Church that he founded.²¹⁴

Furthermore, Vatican II which was inaugurated by Pope John XXIII made a declaration stating that “The Church is and desires to be the Church of all, but principally the Church of the poor.”²¹⁵ In the light of the above statements, it is therefore natural for the Church to be engaged in the mission for the poor. In a Discussion Document the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC), the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), clearly stated that:

The Church as ‘*the people of God*’ incarnates the divine presence in the world. It continues the work started by Christ of transforming the world for the better, improving people’s relationship with each other, challenging corrupt and unjust people and structures, supporting the poor and marginalised and healing the sick and troubled. Like Christ, the Church announces the Good News of salvation and denounces injustice.²¹⁶

It is, therefore, the Church’s prophetic function to manifest God’s presence and activity in all aspects of life, and in particular on those aspects of life that dehumanise the people of God. “The Church has to recognise the fact that the responsibility of redressing the plight of the poor is fundamental to biblical faith.”²¹⁷ As such, the poor on their part look to the Church for support and encouragement as they struggle against oppressive structures that reduce them to a position of insecurity and anxiety.

Furthermore, Bosch (1991) views the idea of mission as an ongoing process of sending one another. He concurs,

²¹⁴ Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator. 2005, pg. 209.

²¹⁵ Quoted in Jorge Pixley and Clodovis Boff. 1989. *The Bible, the Church and the Poor: Biblical, Theological and Pastoral Aspects of the Option for the Poor*. Translated by Paul Burns. Kent: Burns and Oates, pg. iii.

²¹⁶ The Zimbabwe We Want: 2006, pg. 12.

²¹⁷ Sebastian Bakare. 1993. *My Right to Land in the Bible in Zimbabwe: A Theology of Land for Zimbabwe*. Gweru: Mambo Press, pg. 93.

Throughout the forth gospel, sending one another is represented. God sends John the Baptist (1:6); Jesus is sent by God (3:17); Jesus sends the Paraclete (Holy Spirit) from the Father (15:26); Jesus sends his disciples after the pattern of being sent by the Father (17:18; 20:21). In all these cases, God remains the source of mission.²¹⁸

Similarly, Bellagamba (1992) views the mission of the Church as the effective way that can liberate the poor from such forms of oppression. He says: “Mission is helping people who are unjustly treated, persecuted, oppressed by internal and external forces, to liberate themselves, to experience the liberation, the salvation, and redemption brought by Christ.”²¹⁹ Therefore, HIV and AIDS positive women in the area under study, need to be liberated, empowered in ways that enable them to fend for themselves and their families and reduce hunger and poverty.

The theological significance of the Exodus event, the message of the prophets on issues of social justice and Jesus’ central message of the Kingdom of God, informs the mission of the Church in its own particular time and situation.

5.5 Redefining ‘Mission’ in the Era of HIV and AIDS

According to the findings done by the ZCBC, the EFZ and the ZCC,

The Church has a long history of dealing with social needs of the people of Zimbabwe and the world over. It has proven record, which dates as far back as 2 000 years, of caring and supporting those that are in need. It has handled the challenges of refugees, war victims, poverty, education, health and other social issues. Informed by the Gospel and guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church has learnt to respond to the cry of the poor, the cry of the widow and the cry of the orphan.²²⁰

The above statement offers hope that the Church is fully capable of dealing with different kinds of social crises. Today the Church is facing an HIV and AIDS epidemic, a new challenge that is placing many people into a life of vulnerability. Explained by Gabaitse (2008),

²¹⁸ D. Udayakumar. 1998. “Church-in-Mission: Facing Contemporary Challenges”, in Athyal, A. P. and Nyce, D. Y. 1998. *Mission Today: Challenges and Concerns*. Chennai: Gurulul Lutheran theological College & Research Institute., pg. 14.

²¹⁹ Anthony Bellagamba. 1992, pg. 53.

²²⁰ The Zimbabwe We Want: 2006, pg. 12.

The disease has shaken us and unsettled our belief systems, our faith, and our ways of knowing and doing things. It has shaken and unsettled our communities of faith, our education system as well as our economic, cultural and social systems.²²¹

In a similar way, research findings by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) (2003) states that the impact of the epidemic has been felt both by churches and the communities they serve.²²² In light of the above statements, it implies that HIV and AIDS have a devastating impact which has certainly affected every sector of our societies including the Church. The question then would be:

What is the position of the Church in alleviating the outbreak of HIV and AIDS which is “admittedly the most outstanding challenge facing humanity?”²²³

The above question is best answered by (WARC) in a statement which says,

Many Churches have been responding to the epidemic of HIV and AIDS in relation to care and outreach for those who are suffering. However, in many cases, Churches have been in denial that this disease is also prevalent within the Churches. Some Churches have also approached the issue in a judgemental way and labelled those infected with the disease as sexually immoral.²²⁴

The above observation is supported by Dube (2003) in her statement:

The Church interpreted HIV/AIDS as a punishment for sin, thus adding to the entrenched stigma and alienating the infected and affected from quality care... The Church has not adequately/prophetically addressed the social epidemics of poverty, war, gender inequality, discrimination on the basis of racial/ethnic and sexual orientation, international injustice, children and human rights violations which are the fertile soil of HIV/AIDS.²²⁵

Indeed, Maluleke (2003) advances this observation by asserting that “... when it comes to the question of the challenge of HIV/AIDS, our theologians have been slow and silent - and we have reason to suspect that, differences from country to country notwithstanding, the churches have been slow and quiet too.”²²⁶

²²¹ Rosinah Gabaitse 2008. pg. 34.

²²² World Alliance of Reformed Churches Researches. 2003. pg. 136.

²²³ Musa W. Dube. 2003. pg. 211.

²²⁴ World Alliance of Reformed Churches Researches. 2003, pg. 136.

²²⁵ Musa W. Dube. 2003, pg. 214.

²²⁶ Tinyiko Sam Maluleke. 2003. “Towards an HIV/AIDS-Sensitive Curriculum”, in Musa W.Dube (ed)

While Churches have tried to respond to HIV and AIDS, the above statements also show that the Church's attitude towards the reality of HIV and AIDS weakened the progress in confronting the devastation caused by HIV and AIDS. It is therefore the same attitude that has made some of the Churches silent on issues of HIV and AIDS. I also want to believe that the silence of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station, as has been highlighted in interviews discussed in chapter four, cannot be understood outside the general attitude of the Church as explained above, and this is a worrying sign if we really consider the effects of HIV and AIDS on humanity.

Our discussion in chapter two has revealed that more women are currently experiencing the burden of HIV and AIDS than men. Thus, a good number of theologians and especially African women theologians agree that women are more vulnerable to HIV and AIDS crises for reasons affirmed in chapter two and three of this thesis. The factors already described have shown how women are marginalised in this era of HIV and AIDS. This implies that if the Church of St Alois has to work on reducing the impact of the epidemic, it needs to apply new approaches that focus on those factors that push women into an HIV and AIDS vulnerable context. Thus, there is need for redefining its mission in this era of HIV and AIDS. Therefore, a good starting point for the St Alois would be a suggestion by WARC, "... to challenge the negative impact of culture, traditions and religious beliefs and practices which perpetuate the low status of women."²²⁷ This means that it is important for St Alois to deal first with the cause rather than the symptoms of the epidemic. To stress the importance of such an approach, Korten (1990) quotes the following statement from Wayne Ellwood,

If you see a baby drowning, you jump in to save it; and if you see a second and third, you do the same. Soon you are so busy saving drowning babies you never look up to see there is someone there throwing these babies in the river.²²⁸

By redefining its mission, the Church of St Alois will create a new understanding of HIV and AIDS not only for its HIV positive women, but also for the whole community at large. Indeed, Dube regards HIV epidemic as an opportunity for the Church to truly become church:

HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes, pg. 65.

²²⁷ World Alliance of Reformed Churches Researches. 2003, pg. 136.

²²⁸ David Korten. 1990. "From Relief to People's Movement" in Wayne Ellwood, *Getting to the 21st Century: Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda*. West Hartford: Kumarian Press, pg 113.

warm, hospitable and loving spaces where those who are heavy-laden find solace.²²⁹ A better understanding of meaning of mission in the era of HIV and AIDS is offered by Musa Dube who is acknowledged by Chitando and Gabaitse (2008) as one of the African women theologians who has contributed intensively to the transformation of the Church's attitude and its response to the HIV and AIDS epidemic. According to them, Dube is the most active African Christian woman scholar to challenge Churches in Africa to provide an effective mission in responding to the epidemic. They say,

While missiologists debate the meaning of mission in the contemporary period, Dube has charged that the Church's mission is to proclaim life amidst the negative impact of HIV and AIDS. Mission for Dube implies wiping away tears from the faces of African women, integrating people living with HIV, and surrounding those infected by HIV with love and compassion.²³⁰

According to Dube, "The Church needs to realise that today, Jesus Christ stands amongst the suffering saying 'Look at me, I have HIV/AIDS'."²³¹ She goes on to say,

Mission entails being HIV and AIDS competent that is, being able to proclaim life amidst death. HIV and AIDS churches are characterised by compassion and activism. They are "churches with loud voices" that press for the availability of antiretroviral drugs for all those who need them.²³²

Her article, "Preaching to the Converted: Unsettling the Christian Church," *Ministerial Formation*. (Published in 2001) remains one of the most articulate exhortations to the Church in Africa to regard the HIV epidemic as belonging to the very core of its mission.²³³

Furthermore, Chitando (2007) says "African Churches need *friendly feet* to journey with individuals and communities living with HIV and AIDS, *warm hearts* to demonstrate compassion and *anointed hands* to effect healing."²³⁴

By so doing, the Church of St Alois will be playing the role of Moses in leading women with HIV and AIDS to a life of hope. It will be playing a prophetic role in challenging the status quo for the injustices that are faced and endured by women living with HIV and AIDS.

²²⁹ Ezra Chitando and Rosinah Gabartse. 2008. "Other Ways of Being a Divine-Healer, pg. 98.

²³⁰ Ezra Chitando and Rosinah Gabartse. 2008, pg. 98.

²³¹ Ezra Chitando and Rosinah Gabartse. 2008, pg. 98.

²³² Ezra Chitando and Rosinah Gabartse. 2008, pg. 98.

²³³ Ezra Chitando and Rosinah Gabartse. 2008, pg. 87.

Moreover, the Church will be committing itself to the mission of Jesus, thus to bring into reality the true meaning of the Kingdom of God especially in relationship with the current crisis of HIV and AIDS.

Pillay (2009) views the Church as an institute in a much better position to deal with people living with HIV and AIDS. She argues:

Churches are grounded in communities. Herein is their strength and credibility for effective action in response to the HIV pandemic. It is within the space of the local church where people gather voluntarily that the spirit of community must be rediscovered, reclaimed and nurtured.... The HIV pandemic presents the Church with the challenge to create opportunities where people are inspired to “have life abundantly”; where people are encouraged to develop skills to make responsible, life sustaining decisions that are congruent with their sense of Christian identity, and where collective responsibility is fostered, offering an embracing spirit of community.²³⁵

In agreement with the above statement, I therefore adopt the methodological presupposition suggested by Orobator (2005) that “the Church is an open human community of faith that is open to society, to its social environment.”²³⁶ He goes on to stress the point that the Church in the time of HIV and AIDS has to be seen as “a socially open community of believers whose function, meaning and theology reflect in its perception of and approaches to issues of interest in its social environment.”²³⁷ Thus Johannes van der Ven also argues that we cannot undertake a meaningful theological evaluation of the community called Church “separately from the context in which it is situated.”²³⁸

For Chitando, when the Church in Africa becomes fully AIDS competent, the effects of the epidemic will be significantly reduced. Seemingly, an African woman biblical scholar, Madiopane Masenya (2005) argues that if Churches, theological institutions, and Church

²³⁴ Ezra Chitando 2007. pg.12.

²³⁵ Miranda Pillay. 2009. “Women in the Church: Towards Developing Communities in the Context of HIV and AIDS”, in Ezra Chitando and Nontando Hadebe (eds). *Compassionate Circles: African Women Theologians Facing HIV*. Geneva: WCC Publications, pg. 106.

²³⁶ Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator 2005, pg. 25.

²³⁷ Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator 2005, pg. 27.

²³⁸ Johannes van der Ven. 2005. *Ecclesiology in Context*. Grant Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eedmans., pg. 27.

organisations never in their histories felt persuaded and challenged to engage the message of the Bible with people's lives, the HIV and AIDS epidemic is challenging us to do so today.²³⁹

In conjunction with what we have already discussed in the previous chapters, which declared how women are vulnerable to HIV and AIDS, we can see that women are always at the margins of the society. The Church therefore has to retrieve the idea of the God who hears the cry of the oppressed in the era of HIV and AIDS. It is, therefore, part of its pastoral mission to proclaim the God who stands with those who, for example, face premature deaths because they cannot access antiretroviral drugs.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that the motive of the Church's mission cannot be understood outside the Exodus event where God is clearly viewed as the God of Justice. We have also seen that the poor have always been central for justice both in the Old and New Testament. The God of Justice, the prophets and Jesus had the love of seeing the poor and oppressed getting liberated from what was oppressing them at different particular times. Therefore, it has also been indicated that the Church's mission has to be centred on the motive to liberate the poor people of its time, who in the context of this study, are women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station. The discussions in the previous chapters and the motive for the Church's engagement with the poor and oppressed have proven the need for the liberation of the women in their context of HIV and AIDS. These discussions, therefore, form the basis of the theoretical frameworks which will be discussed in the next chapter. Thus the following chapter will outline the suggested frameworks that will help to clarify how the Church of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station can exercise its pastoral mission in the context of women living with HIV and AIDS.

²³⁹ Madiopane Masenya. 2005. "HIV/AIDS and African Biblical Hermeneutics: Focus on Southern African Women," Chakana; *Intercultural Forum of Theology and Philosophy*. 3 (5), pg 21-35.

CHAPTER SIX

THEOLOGICAL AND PASTORAL ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapters two, three, four and five have taken into account the concern for the poor, and mainly focusing on women of St Alois, whose context has been described as vulnerable especially in this era of HIV and AIDS. In this chapter, we shall discuss the theoretical frameworks or tools that have been posited as the most relevant to the situation of the study. The frameworks are suggested as the possible way that can be used to help HIV positive women of St Alois to cope with the crisis of HIV and AIDS pandemic.

6.2 Frameworks

The discussions in chapter two and three, together with the fieldwork findings discussed in chapter four, call for a mobilising of a collective will. Reflecting on the situation under discussion, we notice that women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station are on the receiving end of systemic oppression. They are oppressed by culture and they are also oppressed and traumatised by the political and socio-economic structures of the country. Women are experiencing gender injustices in marriage and all these expose them to vulnerability. As such, their situation cries for liberation from the burdens that place them at risk of HIV and AIDS. These women, in their state of HIV and AIDS are also enduring an additional burden of the negative effects of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme. Having analysed the situation therefore, two frameworks are suggested as relevant in dealing with the situation. These are: Liberation Theology and Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD).

6.2.1 The Framework of Liberation Theology and its Contribution

According to Rakoczy (2004), “Liberation theology was developed by Catholic male theologians who had studied in Europe but returned to their home countries to find that their theological reflection was not relevant to their context of poverty and military oppression.”²⁴⁰ She goes on to state that in 1968, the Catholic bishops of Latin America, meeting in the city of Medellin in Columbia, took a prophetic stance by declaring that the Church must now make an option for the poor and take its place on the side of those experiencing poverty and

²⁴⁰ Susan Rakoczy. 2004. pg. 5.

oppression.²⁴¹ Similarly, Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff (1987) say, “Liberation theology was born when faith confronted the injustice done to the poor.”²⁴² From this explanation, we can see that liberation theology arose out of deep compassion and critical reflection on the situation of the poor and the oppressed. Furthermore, Rakoczy states that Gustavo Gutierrez is the “father” of liberation theology who in his book, *The Theology of Liberation* sets out a new and radical interpretation of the method and content of theology from the side of the poor.²⁴³ As such, Gutierrez’s theology of liberation is based on the notion that the poor and oppressed need liberation. According to Gutierrez and with reference to God and the poor, “The God whom we know in the Bible is a liberating God, a God who destroys myths and alienations, a God who intervenes in history in order to break down the structures of injustices and who raises up prophets in order to point out the way of justice and mercy.”²⁴⁴ This implies that liberation theology reveals God intervening for the poor and oppressed. God is proved as the God of justice. With its roots in America, the relevance of liberation theology is equally important in Africa because of the poverty that continues to dehumanise the majority of people. Focussing on how liberation theology is important in Africa and in particular for women, Chitando (2009) argues,

African women theologies primarily focus on the liberation of African women from oppressive religio-cultural, political and economic systems. They constitute a significant dimension of African theologies of liberation. Alongside their male counterparts, African women theologians struggle against Africa’s marginalisation in the global economic arena. However, they proceed to show how African women are the poorest of the poor.²⁴⁵

Thus, liberation theology is an adequate and efficient framework for the situation of St Alois Mission where women living with HIV and AIDS remain dehumanised by the situation of poverty as well as the situation of gender injustice. Liberation, therefore, is about taking seriously the concerns of the poor and also valuing what they think and allowing them to decide what is best for their transformation. Freire (1972) views the solution to liberation as a process that is initiated by the oppressed themselves. He says, “In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression

²⁴¹ Susan Rakoczy. 2004, pg. 5.

²⁴² Leonard Boff and Clodovis Boff. 1987. pg. 3.

²⁴³ Susan Rakoczy. 2004, pg. 5.

²⁴⁴ Gustavo Gutierrez. 1973. pg. 66.

²⁴⁵ Ezra Chitando. 2009, pg. 27.

not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform.”²⁴⁶ Similarly, Boff and Boff (1987) share the view that:

The poor can break out of their situation of oppression only by working out a strategy better able to change social conditions: a strategy of liberation. In liberation, the oppressed come together, come to understand their situation through the process of conscientization, discover the causes of their oppression, organise themselves into movements, and act in a coordinated fashion.²⁴⁷

Focussing directly on the liberation process of women in Church, Rakoczy adds, “Women in the Church are called to recognise clearly the situation of oppression in both church and society and, as members of the People of God, to exercise their power for change and transformation.”²⁴⁸ She further adds that,

In order for women to act for justice and liberation in their own contexts they must experience within themselves a growing freedom from both the internal shackles of self-doubt and the external barriers which have sought to keep women in “their place”.²⁴⁹

This implies that liberation empowers the poor to liberate themselves rather than waiting for other people to liberate them from the surrounding oppressive structures. Thus, women are encouraged to take up the stage and be on the fore-front in pushing for transformation in the area of liberation.

In view of the meaning of liberation theology, the situation of the women of St Alois, therefore, calls for liberation, as this situation dehumanises them to a state that leaves them vulnerable. With liberation in place, women of St Alois will also need to be empowered in a way that can improve and develop their standard of living in a way that can help them to be self-sustaining. Small scale projects like gardening, poultry, piggery, sewing, cooking, buying and selling groceries or any other helpful and relevant projects to their area could be some of the examples that can be helpful. Therefore the issue of empowerment helps in fulfilling the true meaning of liberation. At this point, we bring in an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model to help make a remarkable transformation for women living with HIV and AIDS.

²⁴⁶ Paulo Freire. 1972. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin Books, pg. 34.

²⁴⁷ Leonard Boff and Clodovis Boff, pg. 5.

²⁴⁸ Susan Rakoczy. 2004, pg 219.

²⁴⁹ Susan Rakoczy. 2004, pg. 386.

6.2.2 The Framework of Asset-Based Community Development

6.2.2.1 Background of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)

Asset-based community development is an approach which was pioneered by John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight. The approach was basically formulated for the purpose of rebuilding troubled communities of some American cities.²⁵⁰ According to the founders of the approach, these communities came to be devastated mainly because of massive economic shifts where hundreds of thousands of industrial jobs had either disappeared or moved away from the central city and its neighbourhoods.²⁵¹ This whole shift forced these communities into a situation where many of the members lost their jobs and were pushed into extreme poverty and destitution.²⁵² With the situation pushing many people into desperation, Kretzmann and McKnight sought a solution by suggesting two frameworks that could help in dealing with the problems that could save the communities from the yoke of poverty. The first framework requires solutions to be sorted out by focusing on a community's needs, deficiencies and problems and the second solution insists on beginning with a clear commitment to discovering a community's capacities and assets.²⁵³ In view of the two options, the second one was found to be more effective in the situation for reasons that we shall see as we discuss the approach.

6.2.2.2 Main Claims of Asset-Based Community Development

As explained by the researchers of the approach, ABCD is an approach whose principles are based on appreciating and mobilising individuals and communities' talents, skills, and assets

²⁵⁰ John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight 1993. *Building Communities from Inside Out: A Path Towards Finding And Mobilizing A Community's Assets*. Chicago: ACTA Publications, pg 1.

²⁵¹ John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight 1993, pg 1.

²⁵² John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight 1993, pg 1.

²⁵³ John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight 1993, pg 1.

rather than focusing on its problems and needs.²⁵⁴ ABCD is a model against a need-driven approach to community development and to development practice in general.²⁵⁵ Thus, the need-driven approach focuses on the needs and deficiencies of the people.²⁵⁶ The researchers stress the point that building a community cannot be achieved through what people do not have. People have to start with the assets that are found in a particular community and also making use of the talents that people do have.²⁵⁷

In view of the model, the idea is to empower the poor with their own skills, especially those people who are not aware of their skills. We can see that the approach involves people at grass roots level and this system helps members to appreciate their own talents. By so doing, the poor people feel part of the whole program and therefore can participate with courage and good will. This empowerment helps members to appreciate their own talents. By uncovering their capabilities, the poor people begin to realize how important they are as human beings in contributing to the growth and development of their own communities. Automatically, they realize that they are not recipients of development but rather producers in the process of community development and goal owners.

6.2.2.3 ABCD as a Principle of Empowerment for Women of St Alois Mission

While it is a fact that the ABCD was formulated to help some of the cities of America, the approach is equally relevant to the context of women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station who are living with HIV and AIDS. The relevance of ABCD is rooted in the idea of mapping the assets within a given community. In this case, it is the mapping of assets within the local community of St Alois Mission. It is about knowing and making use of the individual's gifts and capacities for the purpose of developing and transforming people's lives. Therefore, ABCD empowers the poor people who in this study are women living with HIV and AIDS.

There is always a good and an unhelpful approach to assisting the needy in any given situation. The good way builds up the dignity and responsibility of the needy and gives them

²⁵⁴ John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight 1993, pg. 5.

²⁵⁵ John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight 1993, pg. 1-4.

²⁵⁶ John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight 1993, pg. 9.

²⁵⁷ John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight 1993, pg. 1.

a sense of their importance and value to the community. The unhelpful way degrades them and makes them feel dependent, hopeless and useless. The ABCD approach as mentioned above, empowers the poor people with skills that can help them to become self reliant. It is empowerment, therefore, that is a key principle in bringing about transformation in the process of developing and improving the lives of HIV positive women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station who are in a vulnerable situation. Defined by Narayan (2002), “Empowerment is the expansion of assets and capacities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives.”²⁵⁸ This implies that the use of the ABCD approach can help HIV positive women of St Alois with opportunities to use their assets and capacities in order to influence change. They need to be given the opportunity to start their own projects that can help them to be self-reliant rather than to remain dependant on their male counterparts.

People who are empowered have that freedom and action which enables them as individuals or communities to better influence the decisions which affect them. By being empowered, they are included in decision making. Inclusion and participation of women of St Alois Mission through the ABCD approach is certain to create space for them to debate issues at the level affecting their own lives. The ABCD, therefore, is a model that can build poor people’s self-confidence and make them believe in themselves and allow them to realise their own dignity. To a greater degree, empowerment makes the poor people stand on their feet and influence change.

6.2.2.4 Asset-Based as a Principle of Human Dignity

From a Christian perspective, ABCD is concerned with the development of the whole person, which I see as a demonstration of God’s concern for humanity. God created human beings not in order to suffer but to have life and have it abundantly.²⁵⁹ To have abundant life is to grow and be fulfilled spiritually, physically, socially, intellectually, emotionally and culturally. To be shut out from participating is to be denied opportunities for growth and

²⁵⁸ D. Narayan (ed). 2002. *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook*. Washington: The World Bank, pg. xviii.

²⁵⁹ John 10:10

opportunities for contributing to the growth of others.²⁶⁰ Yet when we look at women of St Alois who are living with HIV and AIDS, we can see that to a greater extent, they are denied the fullness of life. Since human beings are created in God's image, ABCD tries to promote the dignity of a human person. By recognising the assets and capabilities of women of St Alois, making them participate in dialogue and allowing them to participate in economic development, their standard of living is raised to the level of other human beings. "The dignity of a human person realised in community with others is the criterion against which all aspects of social and economic life must be measured."²⁶¹

ABCD in this context is about building a world where every human being can live a full human life, freed from servitude imposed on him or her by other people who might be in power. Human dignity allows people to critically think and reflect on what can shift their own lives from ashes into a better world. The approach, therefore, promotes human dignity.

6.3 Theoretical Implementation of Frameworks

With the situation of the women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station, it is of great importance to know why they remain silent in the face of all the already explained factors that push them into the effects of HIV and AIDS. In responding to this question, I tend to agree with Kanyoro (2002), an African woman theologian, who views women's silence as stemming from some of the traditional practices that oppress them as women. She says, "Harmful traditional practices are passed on as 'cultural values' and therefore are not discussed, challenged or changed."²⁶² This view means that women will remain oppressed unless these traditional practices are challenged. In this era of HIV and AIDS, such traditional practices which are passed on as cultural values will certainly contribute to the fuelling of HIV and AIDS. People, especially women, need to discuss or challenge circumstances that have placed them in such vulnerable conditions. However, the problem might lie in the fact that some of these women may not even be aware of what should be done and how. Thus, the model of conscientisation which was proposed by Paulo Freire becomes important.

²⁶⁰ The Zimbabwe We Want: pg. 18.

²⁶¹ <http://www.ascensionhealth.org/ethics.public/keyprinciples/humandignity.asp>. (Accessed on 15 November 2009).

²⁶² Musimbi Kanyoro. 2002a *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press., pg. 15.

6.3.1 Conscientisation as a Liberation Process

According to Freire (1993), “The conviction of the oppressed that they might fight for their liberation is not a gift bestowed by the revolutionary leadership, but the result of their own *conscientizacao*.”²⁶³ Freire views conscientisation as an awakening process of liberation. For him, conscientisation prompts the oppressed to “unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation.”²⁶⁴ Therefore, conscientisation makes people become aware of their situation, hence making it possible for them to decide on meaningful action. Freire’s concept of conscientisation fits well into the situation of women of St Alois who are living with HIV and AIDS. They experience systematic oppression. From the discussion during focus group discussions we can see that women are experiencing gender injustices.

While some of the women of St Alois did point out their experience of oppression during interviews, a good number of them did not indicate how the situation makes them vulnerable. I also noticed that some of the women in the context of this research may not even be fully conscious of the injustices around their own lives. I suppose each one of them speaks for herself, isolated in her family cell, without information about what goes on around and in the rest of the world. As such, they are content with the lives that they live and, therefore, everything is treated as a normal condition. They have grown up in a system which has become part of them, a situation that has locked them into a vulnerability context. Even as Catholic Christians who are committed to their faith, they continue to suffer the injustices in their Christian homes. Therefore, they may not even see the oppressive practices that are passed down as culture. They can only share their stories when things are out of hand.

It is, therefore, important that in this era of HIV and AIDS, women are conscientised about their situation in society. This will enable them to be involved in acquiring the capacity to analyse the causes and effects that expose them to the risk of HIV and AIDS, and enabled to act logically and reflectively in transforming their own lives. It is only when women realise their oppressive situation that they are able to take action towards liberation.

²⁶³ Paulo Freire. 1993, pg. 54

²⁶⁴ Paulo Freire, 1993, pg. 31.

As regards the situation of this study, a combination of Liberation theology and Asset-Based Community Development is important and requires the effort of concerned women in pushing for liberation. At the same time, the frameworks need to be properly planned and implemented if liberation is to take place. The next concern would, therefore, be: Who should implement the frameworks and how?

6.3.2 Dialogical Action

We have discussed the frameworks and suggested the Church of St Alois as the institution that can best help in initiating the implementation of the frameworks. We shall now briefly discuss some suggestions on how these frameworks can be implemented by the Church.

Paulo Freire's model of dialogical action has been suggested as the one most relevant in the implementing of the frameworks. Dialogical action is a model proposed by Paulo Freire that critically reflects on the banking system of education, where the teacher has all the information while the learner is an empty vessel that needs to be filled with knowledge from the teacher.²⁶⁵ When the learner is not allowed to contribute to the learning process, it implies that he or she is forced to take whatever the teacher has to offer and this means that the process is oppressive.

Dialogical action calls for a participatory approach to life whereby people are consulted, involved and allowed to participate in the process of liberation. By so doing, the spirit of trust, of faith and even of love amongst people within a society or organization is created. In this respect, the oppressors are encouraged to respect human dignity by allowing the oppressed to participate as Subjects in their critical reflection upon reality. As clearly stated by Freire (1970), "It is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as Subjects of the transformation."²⁶⁶

In view of the above, we can see that the question of dialogue is fundamental to transformation. The involvement of people empowers the community to live as human beings

²⁶⁵ Paulo Freire. 1993, pg, 57.

²⁶⁶ Paulo Freire. 1970, pg. 108.

whose dignity is valued. It is this very transformation that the women of St Alois would need, especially in their situation of living with HIV and AIDS.

Whenever there is oppression, one automatically becomes an object while the other one is a Subject. Freire feels the need for dialogue between the oppressor and the oppressed. It is this dialogue that promotes humanisation. Freire's approach calls for a participatory approach to life, whereby people are consulted, involved and allowed to participate in the process of liberation.²⁶⁷ According to Freire (1970), dialogue cannot exist without humility especially on the side of the oppressor. Dialogue cannot exist without faith in people, and cannot exist without love.²⁶⁸ In addition, hope is equally important for dialogue to succeed. In this respect, both the oppressor and oppressed need to engage in critical thinking, thus, if dialogue has to take place then the result of the dialogue will bring the two parties together.

Dialogical action needs to bring the oppressed and the oppressors together and discuss a way forward. In the context of the study, the Church, therefore, needs to look for ways of bringing women and their male counterparts together, women and the community around them, so that through dialogue, a transformation will likely take place.

6.4 The Church as an Agent for Liberation Theology and ABCD

The Church in general, has a long history of dealing with social needs of people at different levels. At many times, it has a proven record of voluntary action aimed at assisting in emergency situations such as natural disasters, handling challenges of poverty, war victims, refugees and other social issues. To stress the point, in a discussion document, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC), the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) wrote that the Church has a proven record which dates back as far as 2000 years, of caring and supporting those that are in need.²⁶⁹ Commenting on a period where churches and missionary societies were active on issues of social needs, Korten (1990) says, "Until the mid-1960s, NGO activities in Latin America, especially those connected with the Catholic Church, were substantially oriented to charitable

²⁶⁷ Paulo Freire. 1970, pg. 248-253.

²⁶⁸ Paulo Freire. 1970, pg. 71.

²⁶⁹ The Zimbabwe We Want:, pg. 12.

welfare actions.”²⁷⁰ Thus the Church has a history of dealing with social crises of the people throughout the world. In the context of this study, it is, therefore, natural for the Catholic Church of St Alois Rural Mission Station to engage in those social issues that threaten to destroy the fabric of its society. Informed by the Gospel and guided by the Holy Spirit, St Alois is called to proclaim life amidst the distressed HIV positive women who in this era of HIV and AIDS are isolated, stigmatised and rejected because of their HIV and AIDS status.

The findings during the field work have indicated that St Alois Mission is not doing enough for women who are living with HIV and AIDS. Apart from preaching the Gospel, the Church does not particularly identify itself with HIV and AIDS women. In fact, it has no particular relationship to women who are facing the crisis of HIV and AIDS. In view of this, the following question is pertinent:

How can the Church of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station exercise its pastoral mission in addressing the challenges that are faced by women living with HIV and AIDS?

In the context of this study and in line with the suggested tools, the Church of St Alois can help in initiating liberation theology and ABCD in dialogical action. I suggest that the Church can help initiate the tools because in the first place, as a religious institution, it is close to people in their different and difficult situations. Women living with HIV and AIDS certainly trust their religious leaders in their desires and aspirations. They view their Christian leaders as their voice, and perhaps the only credible voice they have. As such, bringing these women together to discuss the meaning of liberation and also the claims of ABCD would not be a problem. Teaching people how they can liberate themselves from an oppressive structure would be one of the Church’s priorities, for it will be bringing the poor out from oppression to transformation. It is also important to note that the Church would be in a better position to initiate the implementation of the frameworks or tools because of the nature of its own assets. In his Christian response to the ABCD approach Steve de Gruchy in Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) outlines a list of the gifts that the Church brings to the task of development. These are:

²⁷⁰ David Korten. 1990. *Getting to the 21st Century: Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda*. Connecticut: Kumarian Press, pg. 116.

Trained leadership with a calling and desire to serve people; trained, skilled and committed lay people; moral vision, and a commitment to openness and transparency; gift of property and material; its primary commitment to people; wider networks of information and support and good will and respect.²⁷¹

All these gifts are necessary to the development of different communities. Trained leaders who are devoted to serve people have been equipped with proper skills for dealing with development issues. Some of the trained and committed lay people are promoters and leaders in areas of education, health, etc. All the mentioned gifts are important in the process of liberating the poor, as well as for community transformation.

Perhaps Linthicum (1991) best captures the role of the Church in empowering the poor. He says that the response of the Church is to be the Church with the people of its neighbourhood. According to him, “this approach enables the church to join with the people in addressing the issues of that community, but doing so from the recognition that the only people who in the final analysis have the capability to change that community and to deal with its problems are the people of that community. The task of the Church is to join the empowerment of the community.”²⁷²

6.5 Practical Implementation of the Frameworks

6.5.1 Workshops

Emerging from this research are at least three major issues that are noted to be responsible for placing women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station in a state of vulnerability. These are: gender inequality, poverty and HIV and AIDS. The discussions have revealed that these issues are intertwined and need attention. Women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station who are living with HIV and AIDS are facing the dilemma of three issues. It is the context of the status of these women which has brought about new challenges to the mission of the Catholic Church of St Alois. The Church can no longer turn a blind eye or a deaf ear to the situation. Therefore the researcher has suggested a series of workshops that can assist in bringing about transformation to the context of the research. At least *five* workshops are to be carried out as described below.

²⁷¹ John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight 1993, pg. 3.

²⁷² Robert C. Linthicum.1991. pg. 23.

In this research, men have more often been viewed as part of the problem in the spread of HIV and AIDS. Therefore it is equally important that they get involved as part of the solution. As argued by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, “There are good examples of men working alongside women to break down barriers and advance the status of women in the Church.”²⁷³ This means that men should act together with women in an effort to transform the situation of gender relations and poverty, as well as the situation of HIV and AIDS which is devastating their families, Church and the entire community. The engagement of men in the process of transformation forms a dialogical approach which helps both women and men to interact in an atmosphere of mutual understanding, hence become partners in effecting change.

In the same way, this interaction makes it easier for the Church to have mutual support in its process of transforming the situation, more especially on issues that need combined efforts. Therefore, the suggested workshops combine both women and men in discussions so that the solutions which arise will have moral support and can be implemented without tension or suspicion of each other. The advantages for this approach lies in the fact that participants come to terms with what is going on around them and become aware of their importance in decision making.

6.5.1.1 Procedures for the Workshops

6.5.1.1.1 Important Tips for Effective Running of the Workshops in the Initial Stage

- Participants introduce themselves to get to know each other from the perspective of the work ahead of them.
- Participants share their anxieties and expectations about the workshop.
- Participants, together with the researcher, develop a list of ground rules that explain what they all expect in the working atmosphere. This is done to ensure a supportive atmosphere during the workshops, and to negate any differences or suspicion.

²⁷³ World Alliance of Reformed Churches Researches. 2003, pg. 16.

- They should have discussions on the workshop agenda and where possible, adjustments can be made to incorporate participants' expectations and concerns.

The following workshops are a suggestion of what can be done as a response to the results of this research. The approach has accommodated a number of other people, rather than only concentrating on women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station who are living with HIV and AIDS. This is done as a way of creating an effective transformation for the entire community of St Alois. It is a way of liberating and empowering the whole community.

These workshops will be held at the Church or at a convenient place suggested by the community leaders. Workshops are set to be covered in five days but at different times by consensus of the participants.

WORKSHOP ON GENDER RELATIONS (4 hours in total)

Participants: Priest, Nuns, Mission Council

Facilitators: Invited Guest with knowledge on Gender issues / Researcher

Aims of the Workshop

- To introduce and examine the concept of gender and gender transformation.
- To conscientise the leadership of the Church on the necessity of gender issues both in Church and society.
- To assist the Church and its leadership to utilize fully its own potential and internal resources such as the Bible, theology, liturgy and to develop a positive value system in transforming gender.

Objectives: By the end of the workshop, participants are expected to be able to achieve the following objectives:

- To develop an appreciation of different roles and values placed on women and men.
- To develop patterns of ministry that tries to foster the type of relationship between women and men that transforms gender.
- To utilize the prophetic framework in analysing social injustice.

Activities in small mixed groups of four people (2 hours)

- Participants discuss their understanding of gender.
 - Identifying the roles of women and men in families and in Church.
 - Discussion and listing down the values of women and men in society, family and in the Church.
 - Selecting and analysing some biblical passages that encourage the partnership between women and men.
 - Analysing the biblical perspective of gender justice.
- Presentation of group findings comments and responses.*

Activities in a Large Group (2 hours)

- Identifying strategies for challenging gender barriers within the Church and society.
- Identifying positive strategies for improving the understanding of gender relations. (Allowing women to read and preach in Church, asking men to become ministers of hospitality, encouraging men, women and women to sit together in Church).

WORKSHOP ON GENDER RELATIONS (4 hours in total)

Participants: Ordinary Parishioners of St Alois Mission

Facilitators: Invited Guest knowledgeable in Gender Issues

Aims of the Workshop

- To introduce and examine the concept of gender and the need for gender transformation.
- To engage women and men in a learning process where they can participate in dialogue and experience personal empowerment.
- To encourage women and men participants to articulate their experiences and to become equal partners in their communities.

Objectives of the Workshop: By the end of the workshop participants are expected to be able to achieve the following objectives

- Appreciate the different roles placed on them as women and men.
- To develop a positive attitude on gender issues.

Activities in small mixed groups of about four people (2 hours)

- Participants will examine how different roles are placed on female and male babies within their respective communities and/or communities, by reflecting on common responses to the birth of a girl and boy child.
- Participants will examine how these responses convey certain values to the older girls and boys in the families about their value.
- Discussion on how this can be changed to place equal value on both girl and boy child. Identify familiar myths, proverbs, beliefs, stories, songs, sayings, jokes, insults, etc, which name specific characteristics, behaviour and roles of women and men.
- Discussion on the stereotypes promoted by these cultural expressions.
Presentation of group findings, comments and responses.

Activities in a Large Group (2 hours)

- What are the main messages about women and men as promoted by the myths, beliefs, etc?
- Do these stereotypes affect women and men in similar in similar ways? Why/why not.
- What impact do they have in our communities, families and in Church?
- What barriers do they create and reinforce in our homes? e.g in the relationship between husbands and wives and in the way girls and boys are treated in the family.

WORKSHOP ON HIV AND AIDS (4 hours in total)

Participants: Ordinary Parishioners of St Alois Mission Station

Facilitators: Medical Personnel, Religious Leaders and the Researcher

Aims of the Workshop

- To conscientise the participants on the causes and effects of HIV and AIDS.
- To equip parishioners with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to serve their own outstations and communities more effectively in the struggle against HIV and AIDS.

Objectives of the Workshop

- To develop a better understanding of HIV and AIDS pandemic.
- To develop a way of relating and communicating with people who are living with HIV and AIDS.
- To develop a positive attitude on the whole issue of HIV and AIDS.

Activities in small mixed group of four people (2 hours)

- Participants discuss their understanding of HIV and AIDS.
- Participants discuss what they believe to be the driving force behind the spread of HIV and AIDS.
- Discuss and analyse the impact of HIV and AIDS on individuals, families and the entire community.
- Discussion on who the participants think as the most exposed to HIV and AIDS and why.
- Discussion on the myths, beliefs, stories and values about HIV and AIDS.
- Participants discuss stories that they have heard surrounding the issue of HIV and AIDS.
- *Presentation of group findings, comments and responses from the whole group.*

Activities in a Large Group (2 hours)

Basing on the report from smaller groups, the large group discusses the following:

- The strategies for involving more people in the understanding of HIV and AIDS since the pandemic is increasingly affecting more families, resulting in many AIDS orphans.
- Discussing and highlighting positive cultural practices that can be used to help stop the spreading of the pandemic.
- Discussing what participants think their local Church can do to reduce the spread of the pandemic.
- Identify strategies for change of attitude towards HIV and AIDS in the Church and society..

WORKSHOP ON HIV AND AIDS (4 hours)

Participants: Women Living with HIV and AIDS

Facilitators: Medical Personnel / HIV and AIDS Programme Coordinator / Researcher

Aims of the Workshop

- To assist women living with HIV and AIDS to live positively with their condition
- To empower women living with HIV and AIDS with skills for a deeper understanding of the social and cultural factors behind the spread of HIV and AIDS.
- To empower participants with a biblical basis for fighting the stigma of HIV and AIDS.

Objectives of the Workshops By the end of the workshop participants will be able to achieve the following objectives

- To develop an understanding of the harmful cultural practices that fuel the spread of HIV and AIDS.
- To be aware of the various social factors that precipitate the spread of HIV and AIDS.
- To develop self-esteem in facing the challenges that make them vulnerable to HIV and AIDS.
- To use the framework of liberation to propound the theologies of life, hope and social justice.

Activities on small groups of women alone (2 hours)

- Participants discuss their understanding of HIV and AIDS.
- Discussion on various social factors that precipitate the spread of HIV and AIDS.
- Discussion on the myths, stories, beliefs and values about HIV and AIDS.
- Participants identify useful and harmful cultural perspectives in the fight against HIV and AIDS.
- Discussion on the position of the government, the community and the church in relation to HIV and AIDS.
- Testimonies of participants' experiences of being HIV positive in a family, community and the Church.
- *Presentation of group findings, comments and responses from the large group.*

Activities in a Large Group (2 hours)

Basing on the findings from smaller groups, large group discussion takes place.

- Participants create list of the steps that can be taken at the personal and community level to try to fight against HIV and AIDS.
- Participants create a list of possible key strategies that the Church can apply to address the discussed issues.

WORKSHOP ON HIV AND AIDS (4 hours)

Participants: Men in the local communities of St Alois Mission Station

Facilitators: Medical Personnel / HIV and AIDS Coordinator / Researcher

Aims of the Workshop

- To conscientise men on the effects of HIV and AIDS in families, community and the Church.
- To conscientise men on their importance in reducing the risk of HIV and AIDS.

Objectives of the Workshops By the end of the workshop participants will be able to achieve the following objectives

- To develop a better understanding of HIV and AIDS pandemic.
- To develop an understanding of the effects of HIV and AIDS on their families.
- To be aware of the various social factors that precipitate the spread of HIV and AIDS.
- To gain an understanding that both women and men should fight all the driving forces behind the spread of HIV and AIDS.

Activities on small groups of men alone (2 hours)

- Participants discuss their understanding of HIV and AIDS.
- Participants discuss what they believe to be the driving force behind the spread of HIV and AIDS.
- Discussion on the myths, stories, beliefs and values about HIV and AIDS.
- Participants identify useful and harmful cultural perspectives in the fight against HIV and AIDS.
- Discussion on the position of the government, the community and the church in relation to HIV and AIDS.
- *Presentation of group findings, comments and responses from the large group.*

Activities in a Large Group (2 hours)

Basing on the findings from smaller groups, large group discussion takes place.

- Participants create list of the steps that can be taken at the personal and community level to try to fight against HIV and AIDS.
- Participants create a list of possible key strategies that the Church can apply to address the discussed issues.

WORKSHOP ON ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (2 hours)

Participants: Religious leaders, Community leaders, Mission Pastoral Council, Parish leaders, Women living with HIV and AIDS and any interested members outside this circle.

Facilitators: Invited speaker from Community and Development Department / Researcher

Aims of the Workshop

- To explain the concept of ABCD framework.
- To conscientise people to recognise their own assets, talents, skills and capacities.
- To empower people to become self-sustaining by using their assets, talents, skills and capacities.

Objectives of the Workshop: By the end of the workshop participants are expected to have achieved the following objectives.

- To appreciate their own talents, assets, skills and capacities.
- To develop self confidence in commitment to creating concrete strategies that can alleviate the devastating poverty and hunger.

Activities in small groups of four people (2 hours)

- Participants begin by mapping and naming the assets that are found in their community.
- Participants identify and list the talents and skills amongst themselves and discuss how they can be used to effect change in their state of poverty and hunger.
- *Presentation of group findings, comments and responses.*

Activities in a Large Group (2 hours)

- Listing of suggestions on what participants think can be done to alleviate poverty and hunger in their families and in the community.
- Suggesting a way forward in implementing the ABCD framework.
- Suggestions on how the local Church can be engaged in self-sustaining activities of its parishioners.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined some frameworks that were borne out from the research findings that were discussed in chapter four. Liberation Theology and Asset-Based Community Development were the two theoretical frameworks that were viewed as relevant to the situation of the women of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station who are living with HIV and AIDS. Being the religious institution close to its people, the Church of St Alois was seen to be in a better position to initiate the implementation of the mentioned frameworks. Some strategies like conscientisation and dialogical action were discussed as important in the process of implanting the frames.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The key research problem investigated in this research focussed on how the Catholic Church of St Alois Rural Mission Station can exercise its mission in addressing the challenges that are faced by women living with HIV and AIDS. In an attempt to address the research problem, at least four sub-questions were used as guidelines. These are:

- Why is it important for St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station to engage in addressing the challenges that are faced by women living with HIV and AIDS?
- How are women living with HIV and AIDS in St Alois Rural Catholic Mission coping with hunger and poverty in the present situation of Zimbabwe?
- How does the Catholic Church of St Alois Rural Mission understand its mission in the current Zimbabwean context?
- What can be suggested to help women living with HIV and AIDS to become more liberated and become self-sustaining in the existing harsh political and economic conditions of Zimbabwe?

The first chapter of the research has given a general introduction of the research. It provides the background of the research. It also highlighted some of the academic sources (literature review) whose works have been considered important as references to this research.

In trying to achieve the objectives of the study, the four sub-questions mentioned above have been used as guidelines in the writing of the chapters. Chapter two discussed the situation of women in the context of HIV and AIDS. It focused mainly on the factors that are responsible for fuelling the pandemic. These factors include gender inequality, patriarchy, culture and religion, silence, domestic violence, stigma and discrimination. Discussions in chapter three have highlighted the point that HIV and poverty are closely linked and each in turn increases the other. Chapter three takes into account the situation of poverty as a result of the

implementation of Fast Track Land Reform Programme in Zimbabwe. It looked at how FTLRP has engendered poverty for rural women who are already living with the burden of HIV and AIDS. In view of women's situation with HIV and poverty, it stands to reason why it is important for St Alois Catholic Church to be engaged in addressing the challenges that are faced by women who are living with HIV and AIDS.

Chapter four dealt with research findings in an attempt to further explore the reality of the situation of women living with HIV and AIDS. This chapter has revealed the experiences that some of the HIV positive women are going through. The interviews and the focus group discussions were a true reflection of some of the factors discussed in chapter two which explained why women are more vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. The problems that include stigmatisation, discrimination, domestic violence and poverty were common in the discussions. It was also pointed out how difficult it is for women living with HIV and AIDS to cope with all these problems. The background of the situation prompted the researcher to engage in assessing the mission of the Church in connection with the discussions provided by the respondents. This then led to the emergence of a chapter about the engagement of the Church in the context of women living with HIV and AIDS.

Chapter five was a response to chapter two, three and four. It discussed the engagement of the Church in dealing with HIV and AIDS pandemic. The chapter attempted to justify some reasons why it is important for the Church to be engaged with the oppressed. It has, therefore based its argument on three significant biblical events namely: the Exodus event that reveals the justice of God for the poor people, the mission of the prophets, a mission for the poor and the mission of Jesus. Central to these key insights was the liberation of the poor and the oppressed. Chapter five, therefore, has justified the liberation of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalised as a motive for the Catholic Church of St Alois Mission to be engaged with its poor women who are living with HIV and AIDS.

The chapter clearly highlighted the point that the Catholic Church of St Alois needs to redefine its mission in order to respond effectively to the HIV and AIDS pandemic, employing appropriate prophetic and moral discourses which challenge oppressive patriarchal and other hierarchical power structures that expose women to poverty as well as to the risk of HIV and AIDS. The mission of the Church has been described as the mission of

God (*Missio Dei*) implying that the Church has no other mission separate from God's mission, a mission for the poor.

Having noted from the interviews and FGD as discussed in chapter four, that the Church is not doing much in addressing issues around HIV and AIDS as part of its pastoral duties, chapter six discussed the frameworks as a way forward in an effort to assist women of St Alois who are living with HIV and AIDS. Liberation theology and Asset-Based Community Development were suggested as relevant frameworks to the context of the research. In view of the fact that HIV and AIDS is linked to poverty, the chapter has indicated that the Church will not successfully overcome the challenge of HIV and AIDS without engaging with the issue of poverty in a creative way. The local Catholic Church has been recommended as an agent in initiating the implementation of the two frameworks. As such, a guideline of some workshops has been suggested and these workshops are meant to conscientise the Catholic Church of St Alois, the local people and the concerned group of women living with HIV and AIDS, that in order to reduce poverty and the HIV pandemic, there is need for a combined effort. This implies the empowering of every group in the realisation of the consequences of poverty and HIV and AIDS to the Church, community, families and individuals.

In conclusion, the Catholic Church of St Alois Rural Mission Station has a task to challenge gender inequality that facilitates the rapid spread of HIV and AIDS in women. It is also challenged to confront the political situation of Zimbabwe that has negatively affected the people of God. Thus the fight against poverty in the country and HIV and AIDS cannot be separated from the struggle for political justice. The Church's mission in the era of HIV and AIDS is a calling that entails journeying alongside poor and marginalised groups and accompanying them in reaching their places of pain. This way of doing it offers an opportunity for the Church to recover what it means to be church in the era of HIV and AIDS. Therefore, there is a need for the Catholic Church of St Alois to begin to re-examine its theology and attitude towards people living with HIV and AIDS, as well as those affected by the pandemic.

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Interviews

Chief M. N, interview conducted by Theresa Mugwidi on 15 October 2009 in Silobela, St Alois Mission Station.

Chief X. M, interview conducted by Theresa Mugwidi on 17 October 2009 in Silobela, St Alois Mission Station.

Community leader A. H. interview conducted by Theresa Mugwidi on 20 October 2009 in Silobela, St Alois Mission Station.

Parish Priest B. M, interview conducted by Theresa Mugwidi on 25 October 2009 in Silobela, St Alois

Parish Priest B. M, interview conducted by Theresa Mugwidi on 25 October 2009 in Silobela, St Alois

Informal Discussion with the elderly individuals in the area of St Alois Catholic Rural Mission Station.

APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORMS

INFORMED CONSENT:

Title of Study:

The Mission of the Church in the Context of Women Living with HIV and AIDS: A Case Study for
St. Alois Rural Catholic Mission Station, Gweru Diocese – Zimbabwe

I, hereby consent to participate in the study as outlined in the document about the study as explained to me by the researcher.

I acknowledge that I have been informed about why I am being interviewed/ why I am taking part in the group discussions/ and the possible advantages and adverse effects which may result from my involvement in the above mentioned study. I also understand that I will not be forced to answer any questions if I choose not to, even after signing this consent form.

I understand that the study will be conducted under the supervision of Professor Edwina Ward. Her Email – warde@ukzn.ac.za. Contact telephone 0027 33 2605574

I, acknowledge that I understand the contents of this form and freely consent participating in the study.

Signed: Date:
Participant

Signed: Date:
Researcher: Theresa Mugwidi

Contact Details

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GWARO REBVUMIRANO

Musoro wenyaya

Utumwi weSangano rapaSt Alois panguva vanhukadzi vaneutachiona hwemukondombera varikusangana nedambudziko renzara nehurombo apo Zimbabwe yakaremerwa nenzara.

Ini ndinobvuma kuisa runyoro rwangu pabasa riri kutarisirwa nemurairidzi andishanyira.

Ndinobvuma kuti ndarondedzerwa chikonzero sei ndiri kubvunzwa nezvenyaya inobata upenyu hwemadzimai ane utachiona hwemukondombera munharaunda yangu. Ndarondezerwa zvakare chazvakanakira uyewo chazvakaipira. Ndanzwisawo kuti ndine mvumo yokusiira basa iri panzira kana ndanzwa kuti handina rudo nokuenderera mberi naro. Ndinogona kusiya basa kana dai ndange ndatsika runyoro rwangu.

Ndanonzwisisa kuti basa iri riri kutungamirirwa namuzvinafundo ane zita rinonzi Edwina Ward Ward. Email – warde@ukzn.ac.za Nhare mbozha: 0027 33 2605574

Ini ndinobvuma kuti ndanzwisisa basa iri uye ndatenda kupinda mariri nokuda kwangu.

Runyoro Zuva
Nyakutsika runyoro

Runyoro Zuva
Muzvinafundo: Theresa Mugwidi

Kero:

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Letter of Request to the Bishop of Gweru Diocese

University of KwaZulu Natal
254 King Edward Avenue
Scottsville 3201
Pietermaritzburg
Rep. of South Africa.

31 July 2009

The Rt. Rev. Bishop M. Munyanyi

Re: Permission to conduct research in your diocese for period of three weeks.

My name is Sr. Theresa Mugwidi, a Masters student in Ministerial Studies at the University of KwaZulu Natal in South Africa. As part of my Masters dissertation, I intend to conduct a research project on the following topic:

The Mission of the Church in the Context of Women Living with HIV and AIDS: A Case Study for St. Alois Rural Catholic Mission Station, Gweru Diocese – Zimbabwe

I am therefore asking for permission to use one of your parishes, St. Alois Mission Station (Silobela) as a case study of this research. The intended goal for this research is to engage women living with HIV and AIDS with the process of locating the available assets, skills and capacities within their communities for the purpose of using them for improving their living standards. I will also use St. Alois as the facilitator in the process of educating these women to find solutions to their own problems. It is in this respect that I would like to inform you that the findings of this research will be submitted to the University of KwaZulu Natal for use by other researchers.

Look forward to hear from you.

Yours Sincerely

Sr. Theresa Mugwidi SJI

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEWS

Interview guide for traditional leaders and community leaders around St Alois Rural Mission Station

1. Name of Community
2. Position in the Community

Interview Questions

1. Generally how is the situation of hunger and poverty in your community?
2. Looking at all groups of people in your community (men, women, teenagers and children) which group would you say feels the impact of hunger and poverty most severely?
3. Of the group you have mentioned, can you explain why you think feels the impact of hunger than the other?
(In case the respondent does not mention women as the most affected by hunger and poverty, the following question will be asked).
4. How do you think women in particular are coping with the situation?
5. Is there any help or support that people in your community are getting from any organisation or the government?
6. What do you think can be done to alleviate poverty in this community?
7. What do you think the Churches can also do in helping people to cope with the situation?
8. Considering that women are the people who in most cases are responsible for their dependent children, managing the home and taking care of all aspects of home life, what do you think can be done to help them cope with hunger and poverty?
9. What do you think the community at large can do to help women living with HIV and AIDS in this area become self-sustaining?
10. Any other comments?

Interview guide for Church leaders around St Alois Rural Catholic Mission Station

Name of Parish

Position in the Parish.....

Unstructured Interview Guide

1. Generally how is the situation of hunger and poverty in your community?
2. Looking at all groups of people in your community (men, women, teenagers and children) which group would you say feels the impact of hunger and poverty more than the others?
3. How is the Church engaged in the whole situation of hunger and poverty that people are facing?
4. Have the Church ever been engaged directly with people living with HIV and AIDS in this area?
5. What do you think can be done especially to women living with HIV and AIDS considering the fact in most cases, they are responsible for their dependent children, managing the home and taking care of all aspects of home life.
6. Would you see any hope of bringing them new hope apart from the hope that they get from gospel preaching?
7. With the fact that even food from NGOs is failing to feed the whole country, what do you think can be done to the women living with HIV and AIDS to become more self-sustainable?
8. How can the Church be involved in any self-sustaining projects if the group of HIV and HIV positive decides to commit themselves to start a project?
9. Apart from this discussion we had together, would you have anything to add especially focussing on women living with HIV and AIDS.

Focus Group Discussion Guide for Women Living with HIV and AIDS

1. Age.....
2. Name of Community
3. Name of Mission centre (where applicable).....

Questions asked in small groups of 4s

1. How many meals do you manage per day?
2. How many children under the age of twelve are still under your care?
3. What is your major source of income?
4. What experiences of hunger and poverty which you encountered can you tell to your other friends here (other women)?
5. What do see as similar in your stories?
6. Can you share with the group how your family has accepted your status as HIV and AIDS positive mothers?
7. What do you learn from learn from each other's experience?
8. Now that hunger and poverty continue to threaten this area without any hope to its end, what do you think things have become so tough?
9. What then can you do as women to be independent and become self-sustaining?
10. How do you think the Church of St. Alois Catholic Church should address the issue of HIV and AIDS in this area?
11. Could there be any suggestions that we think the Church of St. Alois Catholic can assist us become more sustaining?
12. With the assets that are in the local area, can there be suggestions of those projects that you think can help you become self-sustaining?
13. What then is the way forward for starting what we think can be helpful?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interview Schedule for Unstructured Interviews

Name of Interviewer: Theresa Mugwidi

Position: Masters Student

Location of Interview: St Alois Rural Catholic Mission Station: **Gweru Diocese- Zimbabwe**

DATE	TIME		INTERVIEWEE POSITION
	Starting	Ending	
Monday 16/11/2009	0900h	1000h	Chief Ruya
Tuesday 17/11/2009	0900h	1000h	Chief Gobo
Monday 16/11/2009	1200h	1245h	Community Leader 1
Tuesday 17/11/2009	1300h	1345h	Community Leader 2
Wednesday 18/11/2009	0900h	0945h	Priest In Charge
Wednesday 18/11/2009	1300h	1345h	Sister Advisor
Thursday 18/11/2009	0900H	1000H	Church Leader 1
Thursday 18/11/2009	1200h	1300h	Church Leader 2

A. Interview Schedule for Focus Groups

Day One: Women Living with HIV and AIDS (Big Group)

DATE	TIME	Activities
Monday 23/11/2009	1000h – 1200h	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self Introductions - Explanation of the purpose and reason for the research. - Explanation of consent forms by the researcher. - Explanation of the confidentiality that the research carries, thus how information will be kept secret. - Planning for the next day's programme - Closing prayer and dismissal

Day Two: Women Living with HIV and AIDS (smaller groups)

(Tuesday 24 to Monday 30 November 2009)

DATE	TIME	Activities
Month of November 2009		
(Group One) Tuesday 24 and Thursday 26	0900h – 1200h	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scripture reflections - Self Introductions - Group discussion on guided questions - Way forward - Closing Prayer and dismissal
(Group Two) Tuesday 24 and Thursday 26	1400h -1700h	

DATE	TIME	Activities
(Group Three) Wednesday 25 and Friday 27	0900h – 1200h	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scripture reflections - Self Introductions - Group discussion on guided questions - Way forward - Closing Prayer and dismissal
(Group Four) Wednesday 25 and Friday 27	1400h – 1700h	

Focus Group Discussion (Big Group)

DATE	TIME	Activities
(Big Group) Monday 30	0900h – 1200h	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Compilation of common ideas from different groups.- Conclusions on the way forward.- Celebration liturgy of togetherness.- Dismissal.