

Dear Colleagues,

The Institute for Reproductive Health (IRH) has developed a tool to be used with Christian audiences to inspire discussion on family planning and provide accurate information about each method. The tool, titled *Love, Children and Family Planning: Seven discussion guides for Christian small groups*, is a series of Bible studies on family planning and related topics.

With support from the World Bank, IRH is currently field testing this product in Kenya with the original partner for whom it was developed, the Christian Health Association of Kenya. We encourage other organizations working with churches or Christian communities to test it in your programs and share your feedback. You can find more information about how to use the tool in the orientation guide which follows.

For more information, please contact IRH (Lauren VanEnk, lev9@georgetown.edu).

Using the discussion guide effectively

Love, Children and Family Planning: Seven discussion guides for Christian small groups

Introduction

Love, Children and Family Planning: Seven discussion guides for Christian small groups, is intended to prompt discussion of attitudes and perceptions toward family planning within the Christian community. It was developed by Dr. Judith Brown, a consultant to the Georgetown University Institute for Reproductive Health (IRH) under the project, *Mobilizing FBO's to expand information and access to family planning*, funded by the World Bank. Christian Connections for International Health provided review and technical input. The audience for this document is broad and could include women's groups, bible study groups, pastors, nursing students in Christian health training facilities, etc. Currently, it has been tailored for the African context but could be adjusted. The content is meant to be discussed and debated by Christians in all walks of life.

Why this book?

Family planning is not often discussed in churches in Africa. Why not? Some are afraid their ideas will cause controversy or will not be accepted by other Christians. Some have heard a lot of talk about abortions, and they wonder if any family planning methods do cause abortions. Others have heard someone say that family planning is against the teachings of the Bible. And other Christians have simply been so busy with HIV/AIDS in their communities that family planning has been almost forgotten.

Churches can help their members, both older and younger, to understand why couples should make good plans for having children, and why spacing children is best for the health of the mother, baby and the family. This book was a cooperative effort of Christian health workers, pastors, church leaders, youth, and members of churches. Contributions and comments came from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, and the United States.

How to use this book

The book has two sections. The first contains Bible passages and suggestions for discussing them in small groups. The second section gives information about the many different family planning methods commonly available.

In this type of Bible study, no one is a “total expert”. Of course, some people will be able to share their knowledge about when the Bible passage was written, what the situation was then, and what certain words originally meant. Others will be able to speak from their personal experiences living in couples, in families, and in communities. Other group members will have knowledge about the human body and will be able to explain some of the health subjects. No one person is an expert in all those areas, and everyone will have something to say and something to learn.

The group organizer has just three tasks:

- Begin with prayer, and ask someone to read the Bible passage,
- Divide people into small groups (each with 5-8 members) and be sure each group has a copy of the Bible passage and the questions to be discussed.
- Keep track of the time, and call the groups back together for the last few minutes.

Chapters and topics

If you turn to the table of contents, you will see a series of chapters based on different Bible passages.

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| 1 | The love between husband and wife | I Samuel 1: 1-8 |
| 2 | Be my disciple...count the cost | Luke 14:25-29 |
| 3 | Wives & husbands, children & parents | Ephesians 5:21-33, Ephesians 6:1-4 |
| 4 | Do not deny yourselves to each other | I Corinthians 7: 1-6 |
| 5 | At the creation | Genesis 1:26-28 |
| 6 | The story of Onan | Genesis 38: 6-10 |
| 7 | Two psalms | Psalms 127 & 128 |

Each chapter prompts the group to consider how the Bible approaches family planning and healthy family relationships.

The second section of the document includes pages from the World Health Organization’s decision making tool (flipchart) used by community health workers in Kenya to counsel community members on family planning. These pages portray the essential information about an array of methods.

Annexes

Annex A provides a sample discussion from a small group in Malawi who explored the topic of how Christians should approach family planning.

Annex B addresses important concerns to many Christians about the relationship between family planning and abortion.

Annex C provides a list of resources where individuals can go to get more information.