

From Nicholasville 1415

Sunday Personality

SUNDAY CHAMPION, October 25, 2009

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MOPELOLA AYOKA

Counselling is required in all human affairs

Prof (Mrs) Mopelola Ayoka Olusakin is the Head of Department of Educational Foundation, University of Lagos (UNILAG) and the chairperson of Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) Lagos State chapter, a multiple award winner, she is also a pastor in the Redeemed Christian Church of God. In this interview with INNOCENT OKONKWO in Lagos, she talks about the role of counsellors in the development of Nigeria and the annual conference of the association.



challenges and as counsellors, we help people to find solutions to their challenges.

It is only where there are no human beings counselling is not relevant. Nowadays, many companies are realizing the importance of counselling when they call us for consultancy work and when we do papers some of them want us to stay on. This has opened doors for some of our students. Many organisations now employ our students. The counsellor has to find out why some people are receiving query all the time, the reason person is behaving the way he is behaving then helping that individual as a human being whose life needs a turn around for better old and young need counselling. Those who are about to get married and those who are up to God for children all need counselling.

Those who are very rich counselling, so that they don't die of attack because of many things they themselves involved in. Those who are need counselling also on how they turn their lives around and become God wants them to become. There one that doesn't need counselling a such counselling and counsellors are relevant in every society.

Why is it that much is not heard of CASSON?

Part of the characteristics professional counsellor is more and we don't blow our trumpet but just as the scripture says, the man's gift makes way for him. People who have come have realized what we can do. Counsellors are necessary and they have things to offer in different areas.

Just two weeks ago, I was to Abuja and was given the model award. I did not know people until I got to Abuja. I am silent workers but we are ashamed of our profession. Very people realize that this is what we do and now are engaging our students in different organizations. Again, any one that wants to get the best of his employees, let them have a good psychologist well being but when they are frustrated, they frustrate the company but if they have some they can go to, who will talk with them, the company will not be spending money unnecessarily on health issues because there are health issues which could be avoided.

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Counselling Association of Nigeria is a professional association of counsellors which has been existing since the 70s but I joined them in 1988. We have our national conference every year and we rotate this round the states of the federation.

That of this year was scheduled for Bauchi but because of crisis in that state at the time of the conference, we decided to move it to Abuja. Next year, the conference will hold in Enugu. Our association comprises all counsellors in primary schools, secondary schools and tertiary institutions.

We have three major programmes every year in our state chapter.

In March of every year, we organize a programme called jamboree for the youths in Lagos State.

Counsellors bring representatives of their students from schools to the event where we always have more than 2000 students in attendance and we allow them to display their talents in debates, march past, cultural display, and drama. They also exhibit what they can do in works of art. That is for March. In August, we go for national programme, then in November of every year, we have our state conference which is what we are preparing for now. This takes place in the first week of November. There are presentations of papers and other ceremonies. This year's theme is, counselling for family stability and implication for national development.

What informed the choice of the theme?

We deliberated on which theme to choose and we came up with this theme because we found out that the family is the bedrock and the foundation of the entire society. If indeed we need to rebrand our nation then we need to go down the root by making sure that the family is strong and that it is what it is supposed to be and ensure that these youths we are producing in this nation are coming from families that are solid and not families where parents behave like cats and dogs and do not talk to each other. Not where parents don't see their children, in some families, both parents don't have time for their children because of the economic situation even before the meltdown, most parents work, those who are not civil servants are engaged in their own businesses, they leave home very early. A situation whereby before the children are up in the morning the parents are already out before the parents come back in the evening the children have gone to bed and weekends that parents should compensate for the time they have lost in reaching out to their children, many parents get involved in lots of activities. Most parents hardly have two hours in a day to spend with their children. We want to call the attention of everybody to the issues concerning the families and stability where father will perform fatherly role and mother will perform motherly role and children will also occupy their role as children and respect their parents.

We want everyone to look inward because it is easy to blame those in government for the rot in the society but who are those in government, they are parents. We need to go back to the root because if the foundation is strong, you can build on it but if the foundation is destroyed there is nothing that the righteous can do.

must be a good foundation from the family because some body from a good family, is likely to radiate life even in the society, such a person is not going to act out frustration even in place of work. Such a person is not going to be involved in armed robbery and crimes.

Under this theme, counselling for family stability implication for national development, we have sub themes such as counselling against broken homes, counselling against premarital sex and teenage pregnancy, counselling against juvenile delinquency, counselling on maternal employment and effective parenting, counselling on economic meltdown and family stability, counselling on andropause and menopause as they affect family stability. Premarital sex and teenage pregnancy which is becoming so common nowadays? In the olden days people cherished virginity before marriage then it was a taboo not to be a virgin but now it is rare for people to remain virgins until the marriage date. We want to draw attention again to teenage pregnancy and abortion which have become so rampant in our society today.

Abortion is murder whether the baby is still in the womb or is already born or still a foetus when people kill the baby or flush out the foetus, it is murder. Teenagers are still children and they still need to be nurtured to maturity before they begin to produce children, babies should not produce children.

Who are the speakers during the conference

We have Professor Kolo Ibrahim, our national president as the key note addresser and Prof. Akade of LASU as one of the lead paper presenters. Prof. Titi Hassan of Olabisi Oribanjo University. Ago Iwoye, as the second lead paper presenter and other presenters. We are expecting the Lagos State Deputy Governor, Chief Mrs. Sarah Sosan and also Mrs. Gwina who has made so much contributions to the growth of CASSON, we are expecting other Nigerians during the conference.

Apart from the family unit what will our larger society benefit from this conference?

Our country will benefit in many areas, we expect that through this conference that parents will have a rethink and tolerate one another especially where there is misunderstanding.

Again, the youths of this nation will benefit from this conference in the area of adjustment to the situation they have found themselves by knowing that they can really make great impact in this nation if they make up their minds. People who are very successful in certain areas are not necessarily those that have rich parents, the most important thing is being focused on what goal that one set for oneself, if that is done there will be success and through this conference we want the youths to know that with hard work and prayer, the sky will be their limit.

Our leaders will also benefit from this conference if only they will listen, they will realize that we have a lot of potentials in this nation and that the youths are our tomorrow's leaders and that they should do anything in their power to encourage and help these youths. Even in their families too, many people in positions of authority in this nation were close to their spouses when they started but soon after they got to the

Apart from identifying with their roots, we will through this conference highlight the need that political office holders should also settle down and render service to the people that they are representing.

For instance, if the Lagos State Governor, Babatundé Fasola decides to be shuffling from place to place, stay in Nigeria for two days, goes to America and Britain or Japan the next day and be flying all over the world, will anybody arrest him? No but he stays in Lagos State because this is where he is called to serve and he is rendering this service to the people. By the grace of God and the help of those working with him he is bringing lots of changes in the society.

Whatever title we bear, we must realize that it has a responsibilities attached to it and we should face such responsibilities carefully by putting in our best in whatever we do.

What are the challenges facing CASSON?

The challenges are many but we chose not to be disturbed by the challenges, we chose to work in spite of challenges. For instance, a lot of people don't even know what we do as counsellors. Others don't even realize that counsellors are necessary in schools. Whereas the national policy on education first, second and third editions emphasized that there should be a counsellor to not more than 250 students for a school which means that in a school where you have 1000 students for example, you must have four counsellors following the national policy on education's directive. Our leaders know what is good but when such a thing is not in their priority list, they ignore it.

In Federal Government Colleges, they have department for counsellors, some of them have eight counsellors while so many schools near them don't even have one counsellor. Where you have any, the counsellor is overburden. There is work overload. How will a counsellor cope in a school of 1000 students.

In some schools, the principals may not even realize that the counsellors are employed to counsel. Some may even see the counsellor as trying to usurp their authority but it should not be so, it is just that when these students know that there is somebody they can talk to, who will not condemn them, who will listen to them and help them find solution to their challenges, they would love to go to such a person and when they tell their parents or when parents visit such school they may want to ask about the counsellor, by passing the principal may cause some challenges for the counsellor because some principals may see that as usurping his or her authority. That is why the National University Commission (NUC) made it compulsory that in the faculties of education, there should be a compulsory course in guidance and counselling for anyone reading education even if you are not a counselling major, at least, to expose them to what counselling is all about.

Relevance of counsellors to national development

Everybody needs a counsellor, counselling is relevant in every sector of the economy of this nation, right from the presidency to the local government chairman, we need professional counsellors, not elected people that become counsellors. Why do we need them, there is no one without a challenge, anywhere you see human beings they have different

depressed person cannot function effectively, in any aspect of organizations or ministry, the counsellor is important either in high and low levels. Counsellors are assets to this nation and the country should utilize them.

How do you combine your role as a pastor, a mother and your professional calling?

It is by the Grace of God. I have love for what I am doing, I chose education from the world go. I did not change to education. I remember vividly when I went for registration. The faculty officer saw my result (I had a grade one in my school certificate). She looked at my result and was surprised asking me why I should go for education, that she was taking me to social science but I politely declined the offer because it is education that I chose to read. I have a passion for it. If you are adjusted to what you are doing, God will give you grace to have joy in it but you may be in the highest paid job in the world but may still be a frustrated worker. My motto is what is worth doing at all, is worth doing well.

Though, I live far away from here, I leave my home early to beat the traffic jam and get to my place of work early, do my work with joy. I also do the church work but any thing I am doing at any point, I put all my efforts into that particular thing that I am doing so you wouldn't know that there are other things that line out for me because I have so many activities. The title of my PhD thesis happened to be 'Activities schedule and anticipation training in the management of depression among Nigeria women'. I knew that I may have more than 10 things afloat in a day that I would attend to. God has been helping me because I organize most of the things by placing them according to the timing that they have to come up and write them down, the one I do I will tick it but each one I am doing I won't allow the thought of the other ones to clash with that one. I will do that one and then move on to the next until it is night and by night I will sleep like a baby. I have never taken any sleeping tablet in my life. The Holy Spirit can wake me up to pray after which I will go back to bed. When it is morning I begin another day's assignment. That is how God has been helping me to combine the roles but each of these roles are not mutually exclusive, they are interrelated which one is outside, is it being a pastor, being a pastor has to affect everyone in the place you are working. Your counselling role will be affected by your pastoral work they are interrelated. I give God all the glory for enabling me to combine all of them.

Can you recall your happiest moment?

My happiest day was the day I gave my life to Christ. I was able to realize that without him I would have been condemned to hell no matter my status. To realize that God loves me as a person is amazing. For the Almighty to look down from heaven and out of millions of human beings and be particular about me to the extend of sending His only begotten son to come and die for my sins. The sin he did not commit. I saw that as the greatest gift that can be given to anyone. Knowing that we are doing, did not end here on earth that we are a place we are coming after we have done all that God asks us to do here on earth it gladdens my heart that we are going home to rest.