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An integrated approach can curb obesity and unhealthy lifestyles: The role of religious leaders on health promotion in Southern Africa

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The growing obesity epidemic, unregulated lifestyle resulting in deteriorating health, the premature and avoidable onset of disease, including excessive health care costs are among major crisis in Southern African communities. This paper argues that religious institutions have been isolated from taking part in health promotion for ages. Religious centers have been strictly regarded as the place for people who needed spiritual fulfillment and not for environmental and

health education. While the notion is valid, whoever, such perception has limited the true essence of religion(s). The global community, with its diverse fields of disciplines, professionals, and experts in every field of endeavor has been working partially or total isolation from one another. Lack of integration in addressing individuals and communities' calamities are equally to blame on the scourge of ill-health. The paper further argues that in order to eliminate the epidemic, an integrated approach by concerned stakeholders, including health care sectors and faith-based organizations are crucial. Religious leaders have more credibility for influencing behaviors than other leadership structures in a given society. By addressing matters of health, nutrition, and fitness

from their respective places, faith-based leaders can be effective agents in promoting critical change in South African communities.

Biography

Ngwako Daniel Sebola is an ordained priest in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, and serves as a self-supporting priest at the parish of Zoutpansberg, Diocese of St Mark, Limpopo, South Africa. He is married, and his wife is Takalani. The couple is blessed with four children, two daughters, Rachel (aged 19), Abigail (aged 14) and twin boys, Michael, and Gabriel (aged 8). He is a member of the South African Police Service, holding a rank of Chief Chaplain and is stationed at the National Head Office, Pretoria.

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