

Original Research Article

Challenges Faced By Lay Women in Promotion of Socio-Spiritual Roles in ST Charles Lwanga Hambale Catholic Parish in Vihiga County-Kenya

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Abstract: This paper assessed challenges faced by lay women in promotion of socio-spiritual roles in St Charles Lwanga Hambale Catholic Parish in Vihiga County, Kenya. It discusses various roles various challenges lay women faces in their various socio-spiritual roles in the church. The study was conducted among various lay women in the five sub parishes within St Charles Lwanga Catholic Parish. This was based on the fact that lay women in the parish are the majority and the most active in their roles in the church hence a need to assess the challenges they face. Respondents were drawn from members of Small Christian Communities (SCCs), Leaders and some members from three lay women organizations which are: Catholic Women Association (CWA), Legion of Mary, and Sacred Heart. The study was based on both primary and secondary data collected and was descriptive in nature.

Keywords: Catholic Church, challenges, lay women, Roles, Small Christian Communities.

BACKGROUND

In an age of turmoil over the roles and rights of women, Johnstone [10] noted that, it is small wonder that religious organizations worldwide have themselves became microcosms of the women's role. Women for a long time have had no role or responsibilities in their churches. All that was expected of them was to attend to the church service, sit down and listen to the preaching and then return back home.

In addition, Kasomo [10] pointed out that in the unbroken tradition of the Catholic Church women have never been admitted to the holy orders, with which the orthodox tradition also concurs. Jesus Christ did not call any woman to be part of the twelve disciples, even his own mother. The apostolic church faithfully carried out this exclusion of women from priesthood that was instituted by Christ. This is a challenge to women roles in the church as it hinders their potential.

It is apparent that the contemporary church's view of women is that she is an aesthetically child centered individual who has no talent for ordination ministry or policy making position. This implies that women are not interested in highly demanding and challenging positions. This is a sex role stereotype and has a lot of effect even in denominations that ordain women. They still do not consider women for higher positions. Their roles in the church are limited on the basis of their gender [10]. This is a challenge to women as it hinders their potential in participating fully in church activities to higher levels of church ministry.

As noted by Getui and Theuri [5] a woman in the Judeo-Christian traditions was subordinate and only honored as a wife and a mother. She was to keep out of the public eye and assume passive roles in the public whenever a need arose. At the temple and synagogues, a woman had to remain silent with a segregated place. Johnstone [6] also observes that within the church we find a long history of second class, citizenship for women. St. Paul set the stage and tone for nineteen centuries that follow as he says in 1st Timothy 2:11-14.

Let a woman learn in silence with all submission and I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first then Eve. And Adam was not deceived but the woman being deceived fell into transgression.

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Some scholars continue to interpret this Biblical text to favor men and subordinate women. Those misinterpreting the text fail to consider the times and contexts upon which the texts were quoted. Such texts have been overtaken by events and are outdated.

Evangelical emphasized the experience of conversion which transformed both men and women as outlined by Ong'injo [11]. The evangelical awakening signaled extraordinary times in which exceptions to the biblical command of silence would be made. The Roman Catholic Church to date enforces the injunctions that women should be silent in all the churches. It seeks to legitimize such policy theologically. The Vatican statement against ordination of women argued that women do not have a natural resemblance to the maleness of Christ. Both the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches oppose women's ministry not only on the ontological basis but also on the basis of church traditions.

In addition, Kasomo [10] noted that all through the ages the church has not been fair to women in its assigning of roles as societies would like to assume. The church for example the Catholic Church has inflicted injustices on women as seen in its hierarchical structures which are predominantly and essentially men. It has persistently and systematically excluded women folk from ordained ministry thus it has kept her away from other roles that can only be performed by an ordained minister. On the other hand women's roles in the church are less demanding and important. Although ordination is not so vital for women's participation, it cuts them systematically from the subsequent religious roles.

In support of Kasomo, Hanson [6] pointed out that, many cultural beliefs have been attached on the role of women. Traditionally in the African societies women were supposed to hold inferior positions in the community. Their task had traditionally been to give birth and to take care of children, prepare food for the family, work in the fields, fetch water and collect firewood. In the Christian church as Hein [7] puts it, the church was set in a world of three cultures namely: Jewish, Greek and Roman. St. Paul who was a Jew by birth wrote epistles based on these cultures on inferiority of women in the church.

Moreover, Tammies [12] noted that the societal role of women also affects their responsibilities. The responsibilities placed upon women by the family, nation and world are very demanding. They are forced to relate daily in family relationships, tribal customs, national government and global economics. Women participate in each of these levels but on each level they lack effective and equitable participation in the formation of economic and social patterns that affects their lives including church. This has been a major challenge to women as it has hindered them from participating fully in church activities.

In addition, Ndeda [13] noted that women are oppressed through exclusion, which means restriction to certain areas and from certain responsibilities, for instance the church government. The main area of exclusion has been that women are prevented from occupying leadership positions, power and authority or from participating in significant ecclesiastical roles. This means that men have controlled the access to decision making sectors. In relation to the church services, raise money teach children but they cannot themselves be ordained or serve in higher positions of leadership.

Ndeda [13] further added that, women have also internalized oppression among themselves. In religion and other areas they become compliant victims. Such women are difficult to liberate because they first need to be convinced since they have accepted the order of the systems of the powerful. Internalized oppression becomes something of a vicious circle since once a woman accepts the judgment of patriarchy they are unable to critique it.

The male-dominated Roman culture into which Christ came as Isiguzo [2] explains saw women as a necessary evil. In Roman law, a woman would be killed for adultery but not the man. The Pharisees interpreted the law to favour men and oppress a woman who was caught in adultery and then taken to Jesus so He could confirm her stoning in John 8:2-11. This has been a challenge to women as they are seen as evil and hence makes them shy from taking active roles in the church.

The study was pegged on feminist theology which is a critical theology of liberation. Rowland [14] a feminist theologian notes that religion has operated with gender blindness and that the Christian churches have failed to promote the full humanity of women in their structures of theology. There have been subordination and victimization of women by recourse to scripture like in Paul's letter to Timothy (1 Timothy: 2:12) and church Catholic Church tradition to show that this was a part of God's plan for creation. Also feminist recognizes the exploitation and oppression of women in the structures of patriarchies. Feminist theology task is therefore to uncover the theologies and institutional practices which perpetuate the injustice inflicted on women and deny their full human subjectively and constructively to create a liberated and liberating theology. In the application of these theology women are trying to overcome the challenges they face in the church by taking up various roles in the church aimed at the growth and expansion of the church.

METHODOLOGY

Data come from two sources: First, library research and second, field research conducted for a period of six months. Primary Data was derived from first hand information through in-depth oral interviews and questionnaires. Primary data was the main source data which was supplemented with secondary data gathered from relevant library data. Sixty questionnaires were administered

to lay women in three lay women organization in the church namely: Catholic Women Association (CWA), Legion of Mary and Sacred heart of Jesus. 148 questionnaires were administered to respondents in 30 SCCs in the parish. Six officials from each lay organization were purposively picked for the study giving a total of 18 lay women who were interviewed. Snow balling was applied to sample at least two lay women for the interview in the SCCs. This gave a total of 60 lay women from the SCCs.

EMPHIRICAL FINDINGS

This section will discuss the challenges that lay women in St Charles Lwanga Catholic Parish face. The section will also discuss the possible solutions offered and to be offered when challenges occur.

The tables below outline challenges faced by lay women in the SCCs and in the lay women organizations as captured in the questionnaires administered during the study. The data will be discussed further in subtitles in an integrated approach together with data collected from the other tools.

The study revealed that there are a number of challenges that lay women face at the SCCs as shown in the following table.

Table-1: Challenges faced by lay women in the SCCs

Challenge	frequency	Percent
Poverty	31	47.7%
Lack of knowledge and skills	21	32.3%
Ignorance	20	30.8%
Poor communication	13	20%
Inadequate finances	12	18.4%
Inadequate support from the community	11	16.9%
Marital/domestic/family problems	11	16.9%
Lack of cooperation	8	12.3%
Inadequate attendance by the congregation	7	10.8%
Cultural issues	5	7.6%
Illiteracy	3	4.5%
Diseases	3	4.5%
Lack of expressions	3	4.5%

Source: Field data in the SCCs

According to table 1 above, the greatest challenge faced by the lay women is poverty. Thirty one out of sixty five respondents stated that poverty is their biggest challenge in the SCC. This has disabled them from meeting some of their financial needs and to contribute economically to the growth of the church. This is followed closely by lack of knowledge and skills as can be backed by their education level which is mostly up to secondary school level. Others complained of poor communication among members within the SCCs which resulted to inadequate support from the community (SCCs).

Eleven out of sixty five complained of having experienced marital, domestic or family problem. Some highlighted that their male counterparts don't allow them to attend to SCCs meetings and to associate with other SCCs members. There are those who complained of having a lot of domestic chores and family responsibilities. These have been tying them from being with others in their weekly meetings. Others complained of being undermined on cultural basis where they are seen just as men's helper and being denied their freedom of expression.

Within the lay women organizations lay women also encounter some challenges as outlined in the table below.

Table-2: Challenges faced by lay women in their Lay organizations

Challenge	Frequency out of 60	Percent
Inadequate faith or cooperation from men or themselves and cultural barrier	22	36.7%
Inadequate resources	18	30%
Inadequate education	9	15%
Inadequate leadership skills and tribalism	6	10%
Inadequate time	5	8.3%

Source: field data

According to table 2 the greatest challenges faced by the lay women organizations are cultural barrier, financial constrains, lack of leadership skills, illiteracy, family responsibilities, lack of co-operation amongst women, lack of adequate time and tribalism and lack of adequate resources to run their organization smoothly, inadequate education, lack adequate time. All these challenges are merged and discussed at length in the following section.

Cultural Barriers

Culture encompasses particular lifestyles derived from history and perceived traditions. It is both a product of and engine for contemporary social and political dynamics. Although by no means static and impervious to change, culture plays a certain role in determining the way we behave at any given moment in time. It defines and is also defined by events happening at local, national, regional and international levels. It also affects our religious beliefs [15]. The research reveals that there are two types of culture-base barriers that affect the role of women in the Catholic Church. They are community culture and the church culture. This will be explicitly discussed as below.

Community Culture

Many cultural beliefs have been attached on the role of women. Data from respondents who were interviewed revealed the following;

Respondent 3: Human by nature is a cultural being. We are born, grown up, live and die in culture. In most African communities women are inferior to men and roles well defined. In most cases women were not assigned roles such as leadership. Neither were they consulted in times of need.

Respondent 10: Even among women themselves some don't believe in women being leaders or even having any potential in anything as far as leadership is concerned. This has been a big challenge even in St Charles Lwanga Hambale Catholic Parish whereby it was noted some lay women suffer from inferiority complex that has affected a certain percent of women who believe that all leaders must be men. Such lay women shun away from any form of leadership in the church even in cases where only women are needed. This hinders women with great potential from active participation in church activities even in the parish.

Respondent 20: some lay women in the parish have naturally grown up in an inferior way. They believe that their Luhya culture for this case does not permit them to be ahead of men in anything but to be always behind them. This has made them shy off from participating in any church activity because they feel it is men's role. This has been a challenge to the Catholic Church in Hambale Parish because it is only a few who have overcome this challenge and are fully dedicated to work for the church.

Respondent 23: Despite the fact that women's roles in the church are so demanding, there is still much mistrust from men preventing them from being given full mandate to meet freely and organize themselves, and be among the decision makers. In many cases, they are looked upon by men as their helpers or the weaker sex who are not needed to complement men in the church work. This notion creates bad feelings among women hence creates bad relationships

Respondent 29: some lay women in the parish are suffering in the hands of men. For some, their husbands cannot permit them to leave their houses and join others for prayers or even to socialize. Some men strongly believe that where two or more women are gathered there is gossip and rumor mongering. They don't associate any female gathering with anything Godly. With such a mentality they do not permit their wives to be in any meeting with other women for fear of negative influence.

Mikula [16] asserted that traditionally, women are defined in terms of their kinship relations with men; as sisters, wives, mothers or daughters. Traditionally in the African societies women were supposed to hold inferior positions in the community. Their task had traditionally been to give birth and to take care of children, prepare food for the family, work in the fields, fetch water and collect firewood Ong'injo [11]. In the Christian church as Hein [2] puts it, the church was set in a world of three cultures namely: Jewish, Greek and Roman. St. Paul who was a Jew by birth wrote epistles based on these cultures on inferiority of women in the church. For example in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 that a woman should learn in silent and full submission and she is not permitted to teach or have authority over a man but be silent.

The Church Culture

Kasomo [10] pointed out that in the unbroken tradition of the Catholic Church women have never been admitted to the holy orders, with which the orthodox tradition also concurs. Jesus Christ did not call any woman to be part of the twelve disciples, even his own mother. The apostolic church faithfully carried out this exclusion of women from priesthood that was instituted by Christ.

The Catholic Church borrowed its culture from the teaching of Jesus Christ. Some of those who were interviewed reported the following:

Respondent 1: Jesus had twelve disciples who were men. These were the ones He chose to work with in His ministry. He didn't choose any woman among the twelve. However women were among His followers, for example, Mary Magdalene and Martha just to mention a few. To date the Catholic Church doesn't ordain women as priests yet they are the majority in the

church and the most active. In addition, women or religious women such as nuns cannot lead mass on Sunday. In short, the hierarchy in women leadership has limitations. This is a challenge to women who are talented and can be good priests who can save and win many souls. Within Hambale Catholic Parish this makes women to feel inferior in church hence affecting their roles.

Ong'injo [11] outlined that the evangelical emphasized the experience of conversion which transformed both men and women. The evangelical awakening signaled extraordinary times in which exceptions to the biblical command of silence would be made. The Roman Catholic Church to date enforces the injunctions that women should be silent in all the churches. It seeks to legitimize such policy theologically. The Vatican statement against ordination of women argued that women do not have a natural resemblance to the maleness of Christ. Both the Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches oppose women's ministry not only on the ontological basis but also on the basis of church traditions. Because of this church culture laywomen feels that men are superior. They believe that they do not need to know a lot about the church doctrine as they take it to be men's responsibilities. This has been a challenge in the parish in that there are very many women will potential to evangelize but they are hindered from doing so because of the church traditions.

Illiteracy

Lack of formal education among some lay women is also a challenge as revealed during the study.

Respondent 17: lack of education has also made lay women in St Charles Lwanga Catholic Parish to be denied better posts of leadership in the church. Although there are a number of lay women who are chairpersons and the vice chairpersons of the various SCCs in the parish, men are the majority in leadership. This is because leadership requires somebody who can communicate fluently in both English and Kiswahili other than the local language. Therefore men are the ones who represent the church (parish) at Deanery and Diocese level.

In support of the above, Kurgat [17] pointed out that education is an essential component of the social service within the broad framework of social development. The missionaries who came to East Africa introduced formal education to countercheck illiteracy, which was considered to be terrible affliction from which people had to be redeemed. Education was an important aspect of missionary work meant to prepare leaders and give them new principles on which to build their culture and oppose evil influences. It was noted that a reasonable number of the lay women in the Hambale Parish are semi-literate. They have low education compared to men and this makes them feel incapacitated in their contribution towards various roles in the church. Some are unable to read any other language except their mother tongue. Consequently, given that Kiswahili is the main language of communication in today's society, they always find themselves locked out of many discussions hence shy away from playing active roles in the church.

In addition, Nasong'o [15] pointed out that illiteracy affects women differently in comparison to men globally. In Kenya, illiteracy among women stands at approximate thirty percent compared to fourteen percent for men. This reality is a major challenge to some women in that they are not able to benefit from the dissemination of knowledge about universal principals of human rights and the advantages of their inalienable rights. This also affects their roles in church activities.

Therefore, this problem has made the few lay women who are educated to be over burdened because they have to occupy most senior positions either to the CPC or in the lay women organizations. Consequently, some women refuse to participate actively in the church for fear of being over utilized. Therefore the semi-literates are the only ones left struggling to play active roles in the church and indeed they cannot be able to cope up with the present situation. The church is encouraging them to join the adult education class in the parish.

Financial Constraint

Financial crisis also affects lay women roles in the church as pointed out during the study.

Respondent 13: Although women roles in the church are of great importance, they encounter financial problems especially where they need money for their retreats, seminars and workshops. Since majority of the women are housewives they cannot afford major financial contributions aimed at their spiritual development such as retreats and seminars and also contribution towards the projects within the church.

Respondent 55: since women are not economically empowered they cannot raise money to cater for their various activities. It limits them from getting access to published literature such as books and magazines that talk a lot about gender issues and leadership.

Similarly, Nasong'o [15] observed that economic statistics reveals that a sizeable number of women are differently affected by the level of poverty in Kenya compared to men .Of the active female population in Kenya approximately 69 percent works as subsistence farmers compared to 43 percent of men. Given their economic disempowered position, women are unable to participate effectively in church activities. They struggle for their daily bread in expense of economic development.

It was observed during a CWA meeting that financial constraints have made women in the lay women organization unable to buy uniform for all the members. This has made some lay women to feel inferior to others and also to be inactive in various roles as they feel inadequate and incapable in all aspects.

Inadequate Leadership Skills

Lay women lack leadership skills as reported during the study.

Respondent 20: There is also a misconception that women cannot do things without the help of men. This makes lay women lack great exposure of leadership roles making them to lack leadership skills. The study further revealed that there is no formalized training offered to equip them with leadership skills. It was observed that women only attend workshops and seminars on matters concerning spiritual growth and contemporary issues.

Respondent 26: Due to the high rate of illiteracy among women they are greatly affected in their involvement in leadership positions. They cannot exercise leadership roles because of their low level of education.

Respondent 35: Getting a full council of officials who can communicate fluently in both spoken and written English and Kiswahili is not easy. The few who are educated are either inactive in lay organization or unwilling to participate in church activities.

In support of the above, Mikula [16] asserted that women have been marginalized for a long time. They were denied leadership positions and in most cases given care-taking responsibilities. Such responsibilities reinforced traditional gender roles of women as secretaries, writers, nurses, cooks and mother's. This denied them a chance to acquire adequate leadership skills needed to play various roles in the society and the church and in the society.

In addition, Oyweka [18] pointed out that in most churches as in the society at large, people expect male leadership as the norm leaving women aside. The society does not look to women as leaders but rather as followers. In both main stream and independent churches, women's roles are clearly outlined. They are given some responsibilities in less recognized leadership positions such as women's fellowship and teaching Sunday school. The main offices such as Deacons, Pastors or Elders are however held by men. This is a challenge to lay women and as it hinders their participation in church activities.

The study findings also revealed that some lay women in leadership posts lack adequate leadership skills. This has been attributed by the church tradition that favors men more than women. For example in the Church Pastoral Council (CPC) men have been assigned senior posts in the church such as treasurer, chairman and organizing secretary. Women are often left to assistantship positions.

Lay women lack adequate leadership skills also because there is no formalized training for leaders to equip them with leadership skills. They only get some form of training through seminars, workshops and retreats which run for not more than one week and are conducted once in a year or twice.

Family Responsibilities

Lay women have numerous family responsibilities to attend to denying them a chance to serve the church fully as expected. This was revealed in the study as shown below.

Respondent 9: young women who are of child bearing age are not active members in church. Some rarely attend Sunday mass and neither do they attend women meetings or prayer in the SCC. This has been attributed by the family responsibilities ahead of them. Some have very young children who need a lot of their attention.

Respondent 14: others failed to plan their family and therefore have a large young family to take care of. Therefore most of their time is spent on those families. Due to the challenges of upbringing young ones such as sickness, many child bearing women find themselves in a state of dilemma on what to do. They end up foregoing church activities and therefore their contribution towards the church growth is insignificant.

Similarly, Tammies [12] noted that the societal role of women also affects their responsibilities. The responsibilities placed upon women by the family, nation and world are very demanding. They are forced to relate daily in family relationships, tribal customs, national government and global economics. Women participate in each of these levels but on each level they lack effective and equitable participation in the formation of economic and social patterns that affects their lives including church. This has been a major challenge to women as it has hindered them from participating fully in church activities.

Also, Flannery [4] pointed out that the creator of all made the married state the beginning and foundation of human society. Therefore the apostolate of married persons and of families has a special importance for both church and civil society. Christian

couples are, for each other, for their children and for their relatives, co-operators of grace. They are the first to pass faith to their children and to educate them in it. By word and example they form to a Christian and apostolic life. They offer them wise guidance in the choice of vocation and encourage them accordingly. The family being the primary vital cell of the society calls for mutual affection of all its members. This has made lay women to be so much devoted to their family affairs than in any other aspect.

According to the findings of the study, it can be stated that majority of lay women are mothers and wives in their various homes. Therefore, family responsibilities at times overwhelm them to an extent that they do little or none at all towards the social and spiritual growth of the church. From the response in the questionnaires in both the lay women organizations and in the SCCs it was pointed out that family responsibilities have been overwhelming and tying women from being active in the church.

The circles below shows how lay women works to balance the family, the society and the church responsibilities.

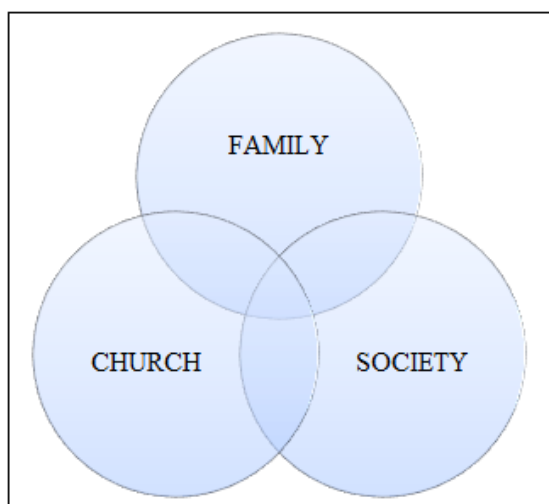


Fig-1: Circles of influence for lay women in relation to their roles

Source: Field data

From the circles above lay women participate in each of these levels but in each level they lack effectiveness and equitable participation of issues that affects their lives. They end up relying on the family circle because it is the one that affects them more than any other circle. This hinders them from playing active roles in the SCCs as represented by the society and also in the church.

Lack of Co-Operation

The study revealed that in most cases lay women in the parish lack co-operation among themselves.

Respondent 7: This has been attributed by a kind of competition in lifestyle among each other. This causes mistrust. Among the women there are those who feel that they are better than others in various ways. Some are just rebellious and uncooperative while others are proud to join others in performing various activities. This has been witnessed among the few educated women. They are uncooperative as they don't associate with others as they feel so senior and look down upon others as inferior.

Respondent 40: Others are selfish and ignorant on what is taking place. They care less on what is happening in the SCCs and also in the lay women organizations.

Respondent 43: some are relatively dormant members in that when they are assigned any responsibility, they ignore it or if they perform then it's not done whole heartedly.

It can be concluded that lack of co-operation also has been as a result of hatred amongst members of the same clan. This has been witnessed in the SCCs where in some mass centers where members come from the same clan. Clanism has been attributed by other factors such as family issues and other social issues and hence affects co-operation amongst members. Those who are mostly affected by this hatred are women who seem to have grudges with other relatives in the clan. Out of this hatred, women and the church generally suffer for lack of active participation and co-operation among women.

Tribalism

Some traces of tribalism were noted within the parish as reported below.

Respondent 3: The parish is located within the town centre therefore not all its members are from the local community. Therefore some are discriminated especially when appointing church leaders in their respective SCCs.

Respondent 17: There has been a trace of tribalism within the SCCs and lay women organizations within the parish. This has been a current problem that came up after the post-election violence in 2007- 2008. A few local members feel that they are the only ones who should lead SCC and even lay organization. This has blocked able lay women from other tribes from participating fully in church activities. They feel like the internally displaced within the church community. They have been kept away from leadership roles and some have been isolated. This has hindered their full participation in church activities.

Similarly, Archer [1] described tribalism as an enemy of the church, a tool of the powers and authorities that set them up against God's authority. Tribalism is not a new issue in the church today. Tribalism existed even during the times Jews and the Gentiles in the first century. It was not so much in regard to social interaction but basically on religion. It was extremely difficult for a Jew to look at a Gentile as an equal.

In addition, Faulkner [3] pointed out that tribalism is the most pernicious of the traditions which the colonial period handed down to Africa. Tribalism was used by the colonial authorities as part of their divide and rule policy. Boundaries were demarcated basing on peoples languages making communities that had history of intermarriage and shared social and religious practice sworn as enemies. Although the church interpreted independence as a need for a white missionary to assume a lower profile and consequently elevate a few African to the ranks of ecclesial hierarchy, in most parts it was business as usual as the church experienced great numerical growth within tribal mindset.

Missionaries were appointed to a given tribe and with them they frequently worked for years learning the local language. They were the first ones to commit the language to paper. They write the history of the local community and introduced a regional flavor into their religious practice. In Kenya, there were three ecclesiastical administrative areas that coincided with the missionary groups that first established themselves in Africa (Holy Ghost, Mill Hill and Consolata Missionaries). These administrative areas were subdivided imposing a checker board pattern on the map that corresponded with tribal boundaries established by the secular authorities. As diocese became smaller, frequently one language and culture came to predominate. In each, diocesan priests were recruited from this ethnic communities and the bishop was likely to have been drawn from its ranks. This was with the exception of the remote dioceses where missionary bishops were still appointed since they were expected to have access to financial support from their home countries [3].

The dream of the local church has been unwittingly reduced to a tribal church. Local priests and bishops frequently assume a mantle of cultural as well as religious leadership. This is not an exception in St Charles Lwanga Hambale Catholic parish.

Solutions

The researcher also sought the views of the respondents on the possible solutions to their problems and the following was revealed:

Respondent 2: The church and society in general should transcend above their limited cultural spheres and become acquainted with global development. The Catholic Church has initiated inculturation. That is, taking part of the good cultural values and inserting them into the word of God that always favors women. With application of these women will feel equal to men.

Respondent 14: The parish has been encouraging women to join adult classes. A large number of women who had no basic education have now joined Hambale Adult education centre for learning. Many can now read the bible in English and Kiswahili and are also able to write. In addition to that through the lay women organizations, the parish has organized seminars, workshops and retreats in order to expose and enlighten women so that they can participate fully in church activities.

Respondent 23: As far as finances are concerned, women have come up with some income generating projects. They have a poultry farm in one of their member's compound where they share the profit from the sale of eggs and poultry. They ensure that a portion of the money goes towards church development like in church projects and buying uniforms for their lay organizations. Some money is geared towards improving their living standards. Some women have formed merry-go-rounds within their SCCs. They contribute twenty shillings every Sunday. This used to settle their dues in the church according to the church and also to uplift their standards of living. It was pointed out that lay women have formed development projects to enable them be self reliant.

Respondent 27: The parish is trying to organize workshops within the parish and also to enlighten women on how to be good leaders. Women are always encouraged to participate fully in church activities and accept to take various posts of leadership in the church.

Respondent 34: Since most women in St Charles Lwanga Catholic Parish lack the opportunity for full service, they need to utilize the limited time given to them in reaching out to others in the parish. They should be able to plan and have an order of priority. There should be models of development aimed at empowering women to make better use of the time available to them. A holistic approach to teaching that focuses on the reality of the daily tasks of women can greatly assist in giving women control over their own time so that they can plan effectively.

In support of the above, Okullu [19] pointed out that, men and women are saved and liberated for the bodily as well as spiritual services of their fellow human beings. God is not a God of souls only, but of the body as well. There is no department of life which He does not enter. Therefore both male and female are all equal in His eyes. With this in mind no lay woman should feel inferior to men as far as spiritual matters are concerned. In doing so lay women will be able to play all their roles effectively.

In support of Okullu, Dorr [19] reiterated that men and women have similar roles biblically. She cited Genesis 12:1-5 where Abraham was called by God to leave his home, his country and culture and set out for unknown land. He heard the call, accepted it and acted in blind faith. Likewise, Ruth in Ruth 1:15-22 was also willing to give up her home, country and culture as well as her former religious beliefs and the security of her own family. She set out for a strange land with a strong faith and trust in the unknown God of her mother-in-law, Naomi. Therefore women should not be hindered or feel shy in participating in religious matters in the church.

Similarly, Johnson [9] pointed out that the Catholic tradition teaches that lay women share in full humanity since they are created in the image and likeness of God. Lay women are equally created in the image and likeness of God, equally redeemed by Christ, and equally sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Women are equally involved in the ongoing tragedy of sin and the mystery of grace, equally called to mission in the world and equally destined for life with God in glory. Lay women should therefore feel they are equal with men in the church and work earnestly towards the socio-spiritual growth of the parish.

In support of Johnson, Melboumet [20,21] further pointed out that all lay people whether men or women share in Christ's prophetic work of giving witness and proclaiming it at every opportunity, and his kingly office by overcoming sin and learning to rule themselves rather than being governed by outside forces or inner forces of sin and despair. Catechism reaffirms that all baptized are completely necessary for the spread of the Gospel. Bearing this in mind lay women should feel obliged to play active roles in the church irrespective of shortcomings.

CONCLUSION

It can be pointed out that, Lay women face overwhelming challenges which are both social and economic. They face cultural barriers from the church and the society, bad relations among themselves inadequate leadership skills to manage their various roles due to illiteracy and low levels of formalized training. They also face financial constraints due to low income and inadequate time to participate fully in church activities because of heavy family responsibilities. These have contributed too little motivation when it comes to some roles such as leadership and participation in political and economic roles in the church.

The study shows that the church is encouraging inculturation as a solution to cultural challenges and encourages lay women to join adult education classes to curb illiteracy. In addition, a holistic approach can be employed to teach lay women how to control over their own time so that they can plan effectively. This can be achieved by coming up with models of development whereby they plan and have an order of priority and utilize the limited time available to carry out their numerous roles. Within St Charles Lwanga Hambale Parish, lay women have been able to come up with a poultry farm and merry –go-round contribution to uplift them financially and be able to contribute to the financial needs of the parish.

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