

MISSION ECHO

UNITED EVANGELICAL MISSION AFRICA REGION

Issue No 50 | January - December 2023



United Evangelical Mission
Communion of Churches
in three Continents



**DO YOU
KNOW
RIGHTS?** YOUR

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Dear readers

The **Mission Echo** 2023 edition is brought to you with themes developed in an academic way with the hope that the mission echo can be used for more purpose. Following are theme developed: **“Poverty Enemy of development”, “Stewardship of church finance”, “The changing landscape in world Christianity and North South Diaconal partnership”, “An Evaluation of Prosperity Gospel’s Claims in the Light of Augustine’s Teaching Christianity.”** and **”Do you know your Rights? “**

The article in this edition is presented to you in English version. In this edition we want to present 4 writers:

1. Kadiva William: wrote about:

“Poverty Enemy of development”: He started with an introduction that provides a common understanding of poverty, he examined whether poverty is an issue when it comes to the common witness of the Gospel that makes God’s mission. He quotes another author’s perspective on reducing poverty by focusing special attention on UEM strategies in reducing poverty, through a biblical perspective, he analyzed how Christians and society should treat and accompany the poor.

“The stewardship of the church’s finances”: In this article he began with an introduction that shows how biblically money is one of the basic resources in God’s mission. He says that good financial management in the church is a basic aspect of a good relationship with God and God’s people. He points out that it is important for UEM to advise and support the inspection of churches. He ends by encouraging the leadership of the churches to seek the trust of financial management because the church member needs to see that what they give is used well for spreading the gospel and not for enriching some people.

2. Inganji Rueben: brought a topic on:

“The Changing landscape in world Christianity and North South diaconal partnership” in this article he started with an introduction that provides the basis of the paper. He talks about changes in world Christianity; He focuses on North and South cooperation and collaboration with each other after COVID-19. He

concluded the paper in a possible way with questions devoted to further exploitation by practitioners in development.

3. Modestus Lukonge.

Wrote about:

“An Evaluation of Prosperity Gospel’s Claims in the Light of Augustine’s Teaching Christianity”

In this article, he started with an abstract and an introduction with a definition of what prosperity gospel is. He identifies key points and teachings in teaching Christianity that address problems of impure or inappropriate teaching by proponents of the prosperity gospel. He present some thought on how to respond to prosperity gospel. Using Augustine’s teaching Christianity as a basis done an evaluation of prosperity gospel in terms of some selected practices, claims and biblical texts; then on selected views from Barth’s writings, by focusing on the Word of God and his pneumatology. He conclude the evaluation and provide with some recommendations. **Allegorical, Context, Hermeneutics, Literal, Metaphorical, Spiritual,** are keys words, you will find in this article.

4. Kambale Kahongya: Ask a question :

“Do you know your right?”

In this article, he presented a summary of the Universal Declaration of the Human Right adopted on December 10, 1948. He underline that every human beings, every society, every organization, every religious or secular institution, every government have to know the Universal Declaration of the Human Right. Therefore, publish them, take them into account and protect them is our responsibility. He conclude the article and confirm: “we are in the core of Human Right Declaration”.

I hope and pray every reader will enjoy reading it.

God Bless you.

Christine K.Musongya.



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The human right Campaign 2024 was launched in Africa Region on 12th December 2023 at Mviringo Hall in Luther House. The participants including media have learn from Rev. Dr. Kambale Kahongya, UEM-Advocacy Officer, about the Advocacy work of UEM in the last thirty years, but also they learn from Rev. Manford Kijalo, ECD lawyer, about the implication of universal Declaration of Human Rights to faith based organization and all people.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a document that defines 30 rights and liberties for every person in the world. It was adopted on December 10, 1948 by the United Nations, in response to the violence and atrocities committed during the Second World War (1940-1945). This document establishes freedom, justice and equality for all as the foundation of peace and justice in the world. Consequently, every human being, every society, every organization, every religious or secular institution, as well as every government must know them, publish them, take them into account and protect them.

75 years after the adoption of this declaration, the world is experiencing atrocious violence and even regions that seemed stable are shaken. In this context of turbulence, the rights and freedoms of individuals as well as groups are violated with impunity, to the point that one would

be entitled to wonder if these rights are really known.

At the church level, it is not obvious that these rights are known, neither to the clergy nor even to the laity. The main reason is that the church has its own principles and values recorded in the Bible and other religious documents, and which determine the life of the believer. These rights, or better commandments or regulations, are considered to have primacy of value over any other principle. Even if human rights are not in opposition to most Christian principles, nevertheless they are not mentioned as a reference for the discourse of the church (preaching, moral conduct or catechism, educational system, etc.). However in considering the summary of the Ten Commandments as Jesus put it: **“Love to God and love to the neighbor”** we are in the core of Human Right Declaration.

The kind of love we own to the neighbor, says Jesus, is defined by the value we give to ourselves: **“love your neighbor as yourself”**. Even in our relationship with God, the same principle applies. When asking for forgiveness, Jesus taught us to say: **“Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have offended us...”**

“Love to the neighbor” is rooted in the acknowledgment of the dignity each person has from the image of God the creator.



Here are some basic rights:

1. *All humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights.*
2. *All humans have the privilege of enjoying all rights.*
3. *Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security.*
4. *Nobody should be subjected to slavery or servitude*
5. *Nobody should be subjected to torture or cruel or degrading treatment.*
6. *Everyone has the right to recognition of legal personality,*
7. *Everyone has the right to equality and protection before the law.*
8. *Everyone has the right to appeal before the courts*
9. *Nobody should be arbitrarily arrested, detained or exiled.*
10. *Everyone has the right to have their case heard...*
11. *Everyone charged is presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law...*
12. *Everyone has the right to protection of his private life, his family, his home or his correspondence, nor attacks on his honor and reputation.*
13. *Everyone has the right to freedom of movement, choice of residence,*
14. *Everyone has the right to asylum in the event of persecution*
15. *Everyone has the right to nationality, the right to change their nationality*
16. *Everyone has the right to marry freely and to found a family when the age allows. The family has the right to protection from society and the State.*
17. *Everyone has the right to property.*
18. *Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.*
19. *Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression*
20. *Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.*
21. *Everyone has the right to participate in the management of public affairs*
22. *Everyone has the right to social security, to work, to protection against unemployment, to equal pay*
23. *Everyone has the right to found or join unions*
24. *Everyone has the right to rest, leisure and holiday*
25. *Everyone has the right to well-being, food, clothing, housing, medical care*
26. *Everyone has the right to education*
27. *Everyone has the right to participate in cultural and scientific life, to the protection and enjoyment of the interests of their artistic and scientific works*

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE IN WORLD CHRISTIANITY AND NORTH-SOUTH DIACONAL PARTNERSHIP

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The paper attempts to address the following issues after defining key terms such as partnership and diakonia: To begin with, we explore the changing landscape in world Christianity and the likely implications on future partnership not least of United Evangelical Mission (UEM). Second another aspect of the paper is to inquire into the historical evolution and relationships between mission agencies and the local church; with a view to highlight what worked well and what could have been done differently. In what ways can the lessons of past mission agencies' work inform future partnerships and fellowship. Third is an effort to establish whether the changing world Christian landscape has in any way affected the model and modus operandi of partnership today. Four is suggestions to what can improve partnership so that it is mutually effective and relevant to the diverse cultural and historical contexts and developmental needs. The *concept of partnership* is used to describe a relationship where actors engaged perceive partnership as a space for sharing, reflecting and working together (1). Another description states that partnership is a transformation process of relationship, a relationship that should be informed by our own relationship with God, nature and neighbors. Partnership is meant to be an encounter where each new person you

meet and the time is sacred because then can the partnership affirm, restore and enhance the dignity of individuals men and women, communities and organizations. Diaconal is understood as service and more specifically social services (Acts 7) and acts of charity (Matthew 5).

Our hypotheses: We argue in this paper as a departure point that a lot has changed in the theory and practice of partnership. Nevertheless, the financial purse still dictates the power relations including the quality of communication. Furthermore, the shift in world Christianity to the global south and especially in Africa has not changed much of the practices of partnership. This has to do with colonial legacy of racial prejudice and distorted mindsets that frame issues from inferiority and superiority categories thereby calling for repentance and liberation of north and south partners (Luke 4: 18-20). Finally, COVID-19 has shown that no race, geographical location or religion is exempt from disaster when human beings do not have a caring and nurturing relationship with creation-nature and above all with God the creator; which in many ways is a contradiction in terms given that religious people are more than non-believers. The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)-agenda may prove difficult to realize should the post COVID-19 pandemic and global economic effect



continue unabated. This is because poverty levels will increase due to the closure of industry and high numbers of unemployed especially young people; while resources decline thus jeopardizing the realization of (SDGs) and the motto, ***“no one should be left behind”***.

As regards the structure of the paper; 1.0 is an introduction that provides a basis for the paper. Section two addresses changes in world Christianity; while part three focuses on North and South partnerships. Partnership and COVID-19 is pacifically given attention in section five. We conclude the paper with possible way forward in section six and seven is devoted to questions to further exploitation and actors in development.

2.0 The Changing Landscape of world Christianity

This section draws heavily from existing research work and data. A bird’s eye view of sample statistics, provided by the Global Christianity report from Gordon Conwell show that: Back in 1970, nearly 82% of the world’s population was religious. By 2010 this had grown to around 88%, with a projected increase to almost 90% by 2020. Furthermore, in 1970 Christianity and Islam represented 48.8% of the global population; by 2020 they will likely represent 57.2%. According to the same report, there are significant

Christianity trends that I have to highlight here namely;

- Currently, almost 640 million Christians live in Africa and 604 million in Asia, while 544 million call Europe home;
- The number of Evangelicals in the world has increased from 112 million in 1970 to 386 million in 2020. Globally, Evangelicalism is a predominantly non-White movement within Christianity, and is becoming increasingly more so, with 77% of all Evangelicals living in the Global South in 2020. This is up from only 7.8% in 1900;
- Christianity is the only religion with more than 2 billion followers. In the next five years, Islam will cross that threshold. Hinduism recently topped 1 billion. By 2050, Christianity will be the first to reach 3 billion followers;
- Christianity is growing at five times the rate as atheism - There are fewer atheists around the world now (147 million) than there were in 1970 (165 million); and
- By 2050, almost 1.3 billion Christians will live in Africa- as Christianity continues to grow worldwide; the main driver of the growth remains Africa, increasing at a 2.86% rate. Before 2050, it will be the first continent that is home to more than 1 billion Christians.

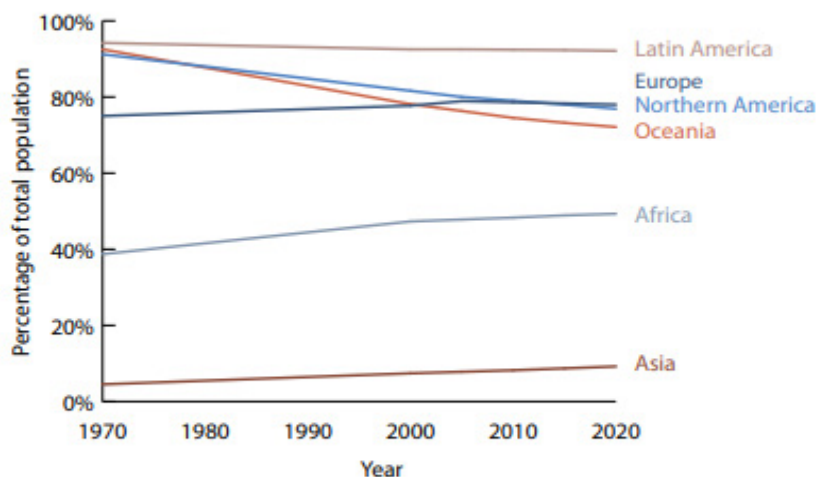
Christianity by continent and region, 1970–2020

Country	1970			2020			Rate*
	Population	Christians	%	Population	Christians	%	
Africa	368,148,000	142,609,000	38.7	1,278,199,000	630,644,000	49.3	3.02
Eastern Africa	111,412,000	55,009,000	49.4	431,818,000	289,235,000	67.0	3.38
Middle Africa	40,750,000	30,113,000	73.9	161,689,000	134,618,000	83.3	3.04
Northern Africa	83,158,000	6,723,000	8.1	231,126,000	10,815,000	4.7	0.96
Southern Africa	25,454,000	19,286,000	75.8	61,187,000	50,361,000	82.3	1.94
Western Africa	107,374,000	31,478,000	29.3	392,379,000	145,614,000	37.1	3.11
Asia	2,134,992,000	95,398,000	4.5	4,565,522,000	420,390,000	9.2	3.01
Eastern Asia	984,073,000	11,449,000	1.2	1,622,681,000	170,953,000	10.5	5.56
South-central Asia	778,833,000	27,222,000	3.5	2,009,512,000	81,374,000	4.1	2.21
South-eastern Asia	285,161,000	50,371,000	17.7	655,941,000	153,217,000	23.4	2.25
Western Asia	86,925,000	6,356,000	7.3	277,388,000	14,847,000	5.4	1.71
Europe	655,881,000	491,756,000	75.0	744,179,000	580,305,000	78.0	0.33
Eastern Europe	276,229,000	158,050,000	57.2	289,166,000	248,098,000	85.8	0.91
Northern Europe	87,351,000	75,752,000	86.7	104,525,000	76,221,000	72.9	0.01
Southern Europe	126,766,000	111,133,000	87.7	158,477,000	129,391,000	81.7	0.30
Western Europe	165,535,000	146,822,000	88.7	192,010,000	126,595,000	65.9	-0.30
Latin America	286,378,000	269,856,000	94.2	652,181,000	600,553,000	92.1	1.61
Caribbean	25,327,000	19,816,000	78.2	44,321,000	37,529,000	84.7	1.29
Central America	69,590,000	67,945,000	97.6	176,389,000	168,540,000	95.6	1.83
South America	191,462,000	182,096,000	95.1	431,471,000	394,484,000	91.4	1.56
Northern America	231,285,000	210,952,000	91.2	374,394,000	288,005,000	76.9	0.62
Oceania	19,506,000	18,037,000	92.5	42,057,000	30,818,000	73.3	1.08
Australia/New Zealand	15,548,000	14,520,000	93.4	30,065,000	19,735,000	65.6	0.62
Melanesia	3,306,000	2,885,000	87.3	10,661,000	9,822,000	92.1	2.48
Micronesia	242,000	231,000	95.5	603,000	561,000	93.1	1.79
Polynesia	409,000	401,000	98.1	728,000	699,000	96.1	1.12
Globe	3,696,189,000	1,228,609,000	33.2	7,656,531,000	2,550,714,000	33.3	1.47

*Rate = average annual Christian growth rate, percent per year 1970–2020

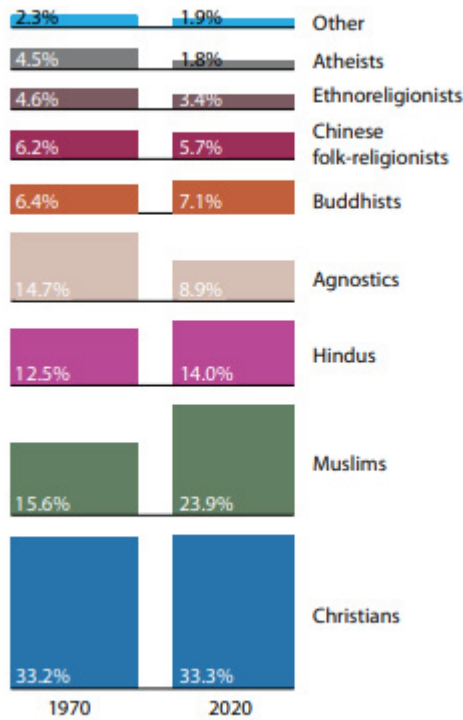
Center for the Study of Global Christianity, *Christianity in its Global Context*, June 2013

Christians by continent, 1970–2020



Center for the Study of Global Christianity,
Christianity in its Global Context, June 2013

Religious adherents, 1970 & 2020



Center for the Study of Global Christianity,
Christianity in its Global Context, June 2013

2.1 Implications of the shift and Lessons

From the above table and figures, it is evident that there has occurred a major shift of world Christianity to global south. In Addition, Christianity and Islam are the two major world religions. Present day Christianity is the fruit of mission agencies 'work although the Pentecostal movement has a substantial input from south to south relationship not least Asia. With this mammoth growth which is almost a leap does it have any bearing on partnership at all and are there legacies from the past which present and future partners can learn from. I wish to highlight a few from my experiences in Africa which include:

The personnel in form of missionaries had a clear calling with a vision although many a time they operated in a Darwinian context of less humans and better humans (racial discrimination). The racial segregation between missionaries and African Christians was a contradiction in terms. Many agencies especially individuals whilst subscribing to human dignity and proclamation of the good news still hold on to the ideology of racism and xenophobia which we have witnessed resurfacing in recent years. This painful reality is not as obviously substantiated by the Bible as during apartheid in Southern Africa. In Africa it is profiling people along ethnic lines and

the question is; when shall we learn that we all men and women, black and white are made in the image of God (Genesis 3:26). Can we affirm that racism does not rear its ugly head in this communion?

Although the growth of Christianity is towards the global south, the depth and breadth has some observers noting that it is shallow. It is in most Christian majority countries where vices such as corruption and abuse of office occur and this begs the question; why and what was omitted in the transmission of the faith by missionaries. On the other hand, after many centuries the north has embedded Christian values in the broader society something worth learning. Both the south and north need to learn from each other in order to avoid a repeat of same mistakes. This is particularly vital given that churches in the south are sending missionaries to other lands including those that have same denominations.

Church structures and styles/modes of governance bequeathed to the local church by missionaries and colonial regimes are not always conducive to the local context especially parliamentary election processes as opposed which ignite an unhealthy competition as opposed to seeking consensus and therefore being inclusive. The individual versus community tension must be interrogated because it is at the heart of most conflicts in church and society – *'the winner takes all and the loser loses all models of competitive elections for office'*.

The global south can learn from the north how *materialism or worship of "mammon"* can infringe on spiritual growth and vibrancy (Matthew 6:24). There are researches showing that in a cities like Cape Town, Johannesburg, Dares-Salaam, Kigali and Nairobi, most upper middle class people would be at home during church services. How can a partnership that focuses on enhancing life and overcoming poverty; speaking truth, justice and peace to power in love avoid such pitfalls? In this case a question worth raising is; what does a North-South partnership need to become an actively listening, and discerning fellowship of God's will and the people's needs? While needs were more evident during the missionary time and while actors were few then, today the landscape is crowded with many issues requiring attention and many actors with different agenda some which converge with that of church but others which are hostile to church agenda, values and approaches

In the colonial time there were missions favored by their colonial governments while others were treated suspect. Today church-state relations vary in many countries, what is important however, is to inquire into public theology that

is biblical as the prophetic ministry is localized to respective situations. It is this advocacy role of the church that benefits from its regional and global networks that United Evangelical Mission (UEM) operate, when our very existence as a communion of churches is threatened by governments. A number of the churches in the north came out of the reformation and new forms of expression of Christian faith were unacceptable forcing followers to flee. This is an area where both north and south can mutually learn from each other.

Ethical issues especially those matters human sexuality – these are very divisive and the question is how can a partnership work without infringing on the dignity of anyone? Local churches born out of mission work question why some mission agencies are deviating from biblical message they taught people of the south and cannot understand what changed in the north as to veer away from what they brought to the mission field. Because of lack of this clarity, we are witnessing a number of churches in the global south using the “*power of numbers*” to determine outcome of decisions in global meetings.

A major influencer of society is media and hence communicating messages. During the colonial /missionary time letters were written regularly although they took long. A fascinating bit about this communication is that it was read to members of the church thus making information accessible. Worth noting is that Evangelicals dominate the sphere of media as opposed to mainline churches. Although technology has eased communication challenges, this remains a thorny issue in partnership. Who communicates with who and what information and how is it received, distilled and shared? North –south remains a grey area needing trust, openness to share matters complex and difficult without ruining people’s character.

3.0 Church in Diakonia

It is important to define diakonia before delving deeper into church in diakonia. First of all, the global North is generally understood to include regions such as North America, Western Europe, and developed parts of East Asia such as Japan, Singapore and South Korea. On the other hand, the global South comprises of Africa, South and Central America, and developing Asia, including the Middle East. Generally, there has been some progress in terms of economic growth and poverty reduction in the global South; however, the North remains rich and the South poor partly due to long periods of colonization and unfavorable terms of trade including extraction

of minerals. This division stretches way into realities of world politics and power balancing. Secondly, it is essential to understand ecumenical meaning of diaconal. The global church looks at diaconal in two ways. There is the theological underpinning of diakonia which perceives it as an important dimension of the nature and mission of the church. The other perspective is practical, describing how churches across confessional and geographical borders including religious boundaries are engaged in socio-economic development and humanitarian support of the most vulnerable communities. Diakonal priorities differ depending on the time and needs of respective communities. In as much as diakonia has been projected as a south issue, the reality is both north and south churches engage in social services because the north has people in the margins of society who may be fewer compared to the millions of people in the global south on the margins or completely forgotten.

The ecumenical movement and specifically United Evangelical Mission (UEM), World Council of Churches (WCC), has had a long history of involvement in diakonia i.e. prior to World War II and after. Dating back to when WCC was founded in 1948, the care of refugees in the aftermath of World War II was a major priority and has influenced policy formulation vis-à-vis refugees, uprooted people and social service work ever since; UEM has continued to accompany its member churches especially in Dr. Congo to care to the victims of internal conflict. There continued to be an understanding that diakonia goes far beyond *emergency relief*. It is on this basis that we have seen the church play a key role not only humanitarian services, but also other sectors like: health, education, advocacy, governance, poverty eradications, gender equality and many more.

In 2014, a consultation in Malawi led to work on a major paper, “*Called to Transformative Action: Ecumenical Diakonia.*” In June 2018 the WCC central committee of the WCC asked for further work on the paper which was presented and approved in its General Assembly, Karlsruhe Germany in 2022. Diakonia according to the document is a mandate “*given to all churches, at local and national levels, and to every Christian as an integral part of discipleship*”. I find Chapter 8 of the working document quite informative and most relevant to the theme of my paper as it aims at indicating some key areas of strategic planning and innovative action in Diakonia where churches, agencies and ecumenical bodies work together. It points at some crucial issues that require attention and that represent opportunities

for strategizing ecumenical diakonia in view of “*the signs of our times*” (Matthew 16:3). The chapter describes vital affirmations such: Knowing the Kairos moment; Diakonia as a shared vision and mandate; Diversity of gifts; Justice as a priority; Strengthening structures of shared action; Strengthening networks of cooperation; Strengthening diaconal capacity; and Diaconal practice and code of conduct. All these are vital for effective and full realization of the diaconal goals by the church not least in UEM, a communion of churches.

The global church exhibits all these through its diaconal aspect. For instance, the church played a key role in achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as it accompanied governments, civil society organizations and bilateral and multilateral agencies; and now continues to be crucial to realization of (SDGs) agenda 2030. It is notable that, the United Nations (UN) cannot fully achieve these goals without the involvement of faiths actors, governments and the civil society. It is thus worth underlining that, mechanisms of collaboration, cooperation and partnership are vital. Forums such as the one convened by the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging with Faith-Based Organizations for sustainable development, back in 2014, offer a huge opportunity for discernment of partnership issues across sectors. You will recollect that MDG 8 was about partnership especially in the area of resources and the same idea is ingrained in the SDGs. Moreover governments opted for Public Private Partnership in Seoul South Korea in 2011 opening space for companies to engage in Social Responsibility.

The UEM and WCC has a long history of involvement in the issues addressed in the SDGs. From the Commission on Churches Participation in Development (CCPD) Churches the Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, the Decade to Overcome Violence, the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, the journey of hope, Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC), economic and climate justice and many more. What is quite evident is that the SDG Agenda can only be achieved by involving a wide range of state and non-state actors in the industrialized, emerging and developing countries. Religious actors and communities are crucial in this process, since religious values influence the thoughts and actions of billions of people around the world. However, in the multi- partner cooperation, FBOs should purpose not to be instrumentalized by the more resourced organizations.

3.1 The current diaconal context

Today, the ecumenical movement has assumed a polycentric nature giving consideration to

the rich variety of traditions and experiences in the life of member churches. This approach recognizes the changing ecclesial landscape as we have entered the 21st century. Earlier in the introduction we saw how Christianity has shifted toward the global South; while the churches in the global North continue to experience declining membership. The global north and specifically Europe will benefit from migrants and refugees as they join existing churches and establish home group ones and thus igniting a form of revival. This new landscape has challenged the Churches and other FBOs and mission agencies to reconsider their work and establish ways to be significantly beneficial to the development agenda. Here are some of the trends in today’s world that challenge diaconal action:

Changing development paradigm FBOs especially those in the north have traditionally utilized the ‘aid’ model of development where they could offer financial support. However, as we have earlier seen, the approach is changing with the development model of offering aid to “developing” countries focusing on economic growth the adoption of UN (SDGs) which seek global answers to global challenges not least climate change, and they invite not only governments but also civil society and faith actors to contribute to their realization. This offers a new dimension for diaconal engagement. It challenges ecumenical diakonia to develop strategies for action, and of equipping local churches and other partners to assume an active role in relation to the SDGs agenda.

Shrinking space of civil society action- There is a rising adoption of repressive NGO and FBO legislations which have become a huge and hindering factor for diaconal agents and their international partners. Furthermore, other laws, such as antiterrorism, safety, security, internet and media laws constrict the civil society’s scope of action including transfer of funds and work permits for expatriates, thus impacting diaconal action.

Rise of nationalism - Globally, populism and other forms of political nationalism are emerging, often expressing national selfishness/parochialism and policies that aim at dismantling principles of global solidarity. There is thus need for ecumenical diakonia to engage in public debate, promote its view on human dignity as God given and to construct civil order based on the common good and human rights.

Religion and development - Religion is once again recognized as a key factor and religious actors as partner in development globally despite the octopus nature of religious diversity. It may be prudent for UEM and Member churches

to increase competence in working with other faith communities and their leaders through proper critique of religion and build capacity for diaconal work. At community level collaboration between religious people subscribing to different religions work to survive floods –humanitarian work.

Socio-economic inequalities – Our world is faced with an increase in inequality. A huge number of people don't have access to common goods and services even with the human rights in place. This puts pressure on UEM and member churches especially from global south.

Forced migration – Migration continues to be a big issue although a historical reality today millions of peoples cross borders into Europe and North America in search of a better future. With changing anti-immigration laws sweeping Europe and other potential receiving nations UEM and member churches should be vigilant and innovative in actions.

Children and youth - More than a quarter of the global population is aged under 15; in situations of crisis and conflict, they are among the most vulnerable. To invest in the welfare of children and young people will guarantee a more positive development of societies. With more children forming more than a quarter of the world's population, churches and diaconal agents need to take a leading role in advocating for their welfare especially during crises, conflicts and pandemics like COVID -19.

Ecological crisis -Climate change is closely being linked to food insecurity and lack of clean water. Ecumenical diakonia thus need to enhance advocacy efforts for climate justice. This SDG number 13 is of great urgency for UEM and its communion, we will either cross the bridge together or we all drown.

4.0 North-South Partnerships: Historical Overview

Over the years, FBOS in the North have played a huge role in diakonia partnering with FBOs in the south. Largely, this is because Northern partners are well placed to engage with the Northern donors, public and to undertake policy influencing and advocacy. This is further strengthened by their proximity to official donor agencies based on shared cultural background, technical and financial resources. It must be observed that present mission agencies and FBOs in the North are building on mission work and that of missionaries whose emphasis was in health, education, agriculture, water and establishing churches. Therefore what is referred to today as global south partners are national churches and development wings and

related organizations e.g. community based organizations (CBOs), Trusts and NGOs birthed mainly by local churches to offer professional support.

With Southern partners largely having local knowledge and networks in the south, it has over the years been an amazing partnership towards development. *However, there has always been debate on how FBOs have sometimes failed to live up to the aspirations for ideal partnership based on solidarity and mutuality.* For instance, the relationship has over the years been distorted due to the to the dominant donor-recipient approach. Many FBOs have always wished to be associated with the partnership concept that goes beyond financial aid and one that is mutually accountable. However, there is a contradiction between the implied mutuality and equality of the term 'partnership' and the fact that in reality partnerships are generally weighted in favor of the North, given its control over financial resources and at times accounting and reporting standards beyond local capacity. There is however no doubting the growth and adaptation of partnership formats globally and regionally. Funding from Back donors e.g. governments have pushed both north and south to scale up their skills and use professionals within their communities of faith and not necessarily the clergy.

4.1 Global Trends - At the international level, we can now see the development of new organizational formats and international structures aimed at scaling up to enhance interconnectivity for better results/impact. Global INGOs such as Action Aid embrace this kind of federal model. It is interesting to however, note that others like Save the Children developing advanced nonfederal models.

A vital example of an emerging trend is that of Action by Churches Together (ACT) Alliance of which a number of UEM member churches are members at national and regional networks; ACT Alliance helped build partnerships between like-minded FBOs. *This dynamic and changing environment has generated new interest in the way that the sector needs to evolve and change.* There are growing talks on the need to consolidate or collaborate among Northern NGOs in general. This is due to the fact that Northern partners are longing for cost-effective ways by working closely with governments and the private sector. Dominant themes at the global level include: Climate change, immigration and refugee issues, changing poverty demographics, widening inequality and changing power dynamics between North and South. These trends thus prompt for reconsideration of strategies that

need to be adopted and what capacities need to be enhanced.

4.2 Trends in the south- As for the South, this changing nature of partnership with Northern partners has brought to the fore concerns on the need for research and analysis on what trends and challenges partners in the south are facing and what would be the appropriate response. This stems from the perception that analysis of the global trends and their implications for the work of implementing partners is driven by the analysis of Northern partners rather than local NGOs and FBOs. Over the years, there has been a feeling that sometimes projects by local Southern churches, NGOs would easily be hampered by donor decisions. Specifically, the increasingly occurrence of trends such the “cut and shut” by donors continues to have a negative impact as very few Southern FBOs are endowed to insulate against such uncertainties. Additionally, there are some disparities in the demands on local FBOs and NGOs as compared to those in the North. They are mostly small, operate in dynamic political setups and the decisions they make directly impact how they are perceived by local communities. Furthermore, Southern partners find themselves on the cutting edge powerful external disruptors such as natural disasters, emerging technologies, climate change, and the consequences of inequality, poverty and conflict. It is vital to consider their perspectives as they perform a crucial role as local development actors and their close relationships with local communities for a lasting impact towards fulfillment of the 2030 SDGs agenda. Here are some specific perspectives by the south on partnerships

Changing Expectations: Southern Partners want less domination by Northern NGOs and for their knowledge and skills to be recognized. Even where partnership is seen as positive, Southern Partners do not want to be controlled. Some Southern Partners think that partnership is difficult, and do not believe in true partnership because of the heavy focus on financial relationship and the relative powerful/weak positions of the two Partners. There is too little attention paid to the mutual benefits and the totality of the Partners’ respective contributions.

Dependency fears- Some Southern Partners fear becoming too dependent on a few organizations, which would also be problematic for their local accountability. This leads to the dilemma of how far Partners are independent; do Southern Partners end listening more to the Northern NGO than to their local constituencies?

Equality- *Acknowledge diverse talents and their*

mutual use for strengthening partnership- In practice, Northern partners decide the financial framework and this can tilt relations. However, size and dependence could prove crucial. Larger ones tend to strike a fair level of equality with Northern partners but smaller ones find it very elusive because of dependency.

Note: partners in south especially Africa are comparing missionaries who worked relatively free and their agenda setting process was much simpler. Today agenda formulation and determination is more complex due to many needs and a load of requirements. Trust and flexibility were evident as well as quick decision making during mission/colonial days but no longer so.

4.4 Principles of effective partnerships

Partnership principles/values are often seen to be part of the organization’s culture, and thus inform policy and system, type of staff, structure and not least communication with significant differences in approach between individual staff and between different regions or countries. This reflects, to a certain extent, the fact that project funding is a core activity and has traditionally been a central focus; funding systems and procedures are almost always far more systematized than partnership processes. It is however important to note that few of the NGOs have formalized, clearly defined principles for partnerships at a policy or procedural level. Many of the organizations do have general statements on partnerships within policy documents such as mission or value statements but still no clear principles. Here are some of the common principles for effective partnerships:

- Clear communication of policies and expectations;
- Flexibility in accessing funding applications, depending on the organization;
- Dialogue with the Partner and spending time in field visits;
- Undertake to be a good donor by timely transfer of funds and co-ordination with other donors;
- Recognition of the need for checks and balances in the donor-recipient relationship
- Core values: respect for diversity, learning from others;
- Autonomy: respect for self-governance together with interdependence; Mutual accountability
- Consultative decision-making; and Transparency.

4.5 Emerging partnership typologies

In recent times, partnership has become a word that covers a great range of different sorts of relationships between FBOs in the North and those in the south. To thus define partnership in its current context, it's important to look at the range of working relationships being utilized to support and extend diaconal work. The normal way is to classify partnerships based on the parties involved, however I intend to highlight some other typologies of partnerships based on purpose that continue to pop up even today. These include:

Partnerships for more effective development at the local level - This is the most common one where Northern partners engage with churches and FBO's in the south through offering financial support for development. Of late, the main purpose of these partnerships has been enhancing the capacity of FBOs in the South thus strengthening their ability in diaconal work. Lately, the purpose of the capacity support is evolving towards being less about developing an organization that will respond to the needs of the Northern partner, and more about what a local FBO requires to be effective in their context.

Partnerships to support civil society development - It has become common to see Northern partners building partnerships based on the need to embolden civil society capacity in the South. In this latest setup, Northern partners are not just focused on development of a specific organization at local level and what it could then achieve, they are going further to foster FBOs in the south so that they can work together with others as required. This is an approach that seeks to build legitimate and sustainable local institutions able to provide relevant engagement in their local and national context for many years into the future.

Partnerships and alliances for social change - Another emerging typology is where FBOs are working as members in networks of other FBOs and development agencies for social change. This is due to the recognition that such networks are having huge impacts on the new shifts in the development world. Though it raises considerable challenges in terms of short to intermediate outcomes, its main purpose is to contribute to more substantive social change.

South-South Cooperation - Another variation that is gaining momentum is the South-South co-operation or rather triangular cooperation. It complements South-South and North-South cooperation, creates horizontal coalitions around the pursuit of shared development goals. It is a transformative modality that builds on the complementary strengths of different

development partners to bring innovative and flexible solutions that address fast-changing development challenges. In 2019, the Second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Co-operation (BAPA +40) prominently featured triangular co-operation in the Conference agenda. The overarching theme of BAPA +40 was "The Role of South-South Co-operation and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Challenges and Opportunities." It integrates very diverse partners and has proven to be a mechanism that brings together different perspectives and incorporates the diversity and multiplicity of today's development stakeholders. The SDGs are multi-dimensional and interrelated - the versatile model of triangular co-operation responds well to this complexity and turns challenges into opportunities.

What would you consider as a likely typology for your organization?

4.2 North- South Partnership Challenges

Ending Partnerships - There has been a degree of confusion between ending project funding with a Southern NGO and actually ending the partnership per se. For most NGOs in the south, project exit-strategies are often interpreted to mean the same as ending a partnership. Part of the problem relates to clarity over the objectives of the partnership; clearly defined objectives assist in identifying when phase-out should occur. However, it is not easy to state in advance - at the beginning of a relationship - when the time for phasing out will occur. Ending a partnership is perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of the whole process. There is a delicate balance to be struck between providing support for the purpose of capacity building, and being loyal to an organization which is not seen to be effective. However, it is easier to decide when to phase out if an objective for the partnership is agreed from the beginning, as it is then possible to identify whether or not the objective has been achieved.

Funding Processes and Distorted Accountability - The continued dependence for finance support from international organizations means that there occurs manipulation of agendas. The strict reporting requirements of government donors some of which emphasize the need for stricter control of the process by Northern 'intermediary' NGO prove to be a challenge.

Moving from a project to a partner focus - the benefits of partnerships is much broader than the project funding system, but funding tends to dominate. Northern NGOs need to find ways of safeguarding the central purpose of their partner relationships.

Organizational Capacity Limits - There has always been a capacity mismatch between small, Southern partner organizations and large Northern NGOs; partnership dialogue is much easier to achieve between organizations of similar size and capacity. Only strong, Southern partners with a clear identity can withstand the risk of becoming donor-driven. Northern NGOs need to develop greater clarity in identifying different types and phases of relationships with Southern partners. They too, have capacity issues especially on the following fronts:

- The **number and depth of partnerships** - Northern NGOs have to balance the need to spend funds with the development of close partnerships. It is not possible to develop strong partnerships with all Southern NGOs, and some are actively reducing their number of partners. This thin veil of partnership differed from the missionary time when relationships lasted longer and hence better knowledge of each other
- Lack of **co-ordination** - Greater effort is needed to ensure that co-ordination with other agencies is established from the beginning. This is to avoid duplication of roles and “overfunding” of southern NGOs to achieve the same thing. Again during mission time missionaries had home churches but were not as coordinated agencies as the members of UEM that meet occasionally making coordination critical
- The **“taboo” of money** - FBOs find talking about funds a taboo especially when it comes to the principles of sharing resources and close partner relationships monitoring. Unlike in the past where donations were limited and people on the ground to validate who even spoke the local languages (missionaries); the money is much more and the time of field staff presence if any is limited. As a matter of fact the money for diaconal is much more than what the church has for evangelism. This at times creates conflict between evangelism and service. Mission time all was within the same person/people. This has over the years led to a breakdown in relationships.
- **Being unable to deliver** - When the church/NGO is unable to keep its promises concerning funds, development workers, or other resources, this can cause problems of credibility and integrity.
- **Organizational barriers** - Within the organization, there may be conflicts over different goals; some staff may prioritize time and energy for developing the partnership relationship, whilst others see a pressure to deliver results in terms

of measurable outputs.

- **Relational barriers** - Lack of trust, suspicion and not understanding the other’s context can be barriers, as can distance and not dealing with crises. Partnership takes time and the relationship needs to be established gradually; the availability of funding can put pressure on this process.
- **Managing Transition** - There is a critical transition process for staff from being managers to being facilitators. The desire to control programs can still dominate; time is needed in order to build up trust and confidence, understand organizations and the nuances of how they work. It takes time to build a culture of working with partners, working out what level of detail is required in discussions

4.3 Trends that could shape future partnerships in the ecumenical diakonia globally

4.3.1 Overcoming poverty and inequality –

There is sure a huge shift in the development agenda on poverty and inequality in the world today. This shift should affect who faith based organizations (FBOs) are partnering with, where they are partnering and how they are partnering. Poverty, conflict and humanitarian issues will sadly continue to exist for the coming decade. However, estimates indicate more poor people - the traditional target group of International FBOs - will be living in neighborhoods which have enough domestic resources to address their problems over time. In these cases, FBOs will need to move beyond ‘traditional’ aid relationships and projects and instead focus on finding alternative means of supporting poverty reduction and associated inequality.

4.3.2 Changing power relations

New types of donors/funding are coming up with alternative sources of funding and thus may shake the underlying power dynamic. Over the years, imbalances in power relations have been named as a huge barrier to effective partnerships, particularly donor-recipient and north-south partnerships. However, partners with access to multiple funding sources are in advantageous positions to negotiate. Furthermore, processes whereby individual donors directly support local projects and organizations, via web-based platforms, also put greater pressure on more traditional ones. By reducing their previous influence, traditional FBOs might need to re-imagine their roles within partnerships, and how they best add value to them. Perhaps this is the place to mention that Asian churches especially south Korea are a factor in evangelism/mission

and diakonia which may alter the current dominant north/south relations

4.3.3 Becoming conveners and facilitators

Most international faith based organizations, with their intermediary status, are traditionally well placed to provide resources such as specialist support and advice to partners, connections within their partnership networks, and to mediate between different approaches to social change. We have already seen cases where International FBOs are successfully working as facilitators of change on either or both sides of a service relationship. This will thus mean that most of them develop new skills and competencies in learning, bridging, mediation, dialogue and influencing to support these roles and relationships. This will require thinking about partnerships as more than bilateral relationships with a single 'partner' or counterpart, but rather being about engaging with multiple actors at the same time through networks, coalitions and alliances.

4.3.4 Adjusting to political realities

Ideally, there is always pressure on international faith based organizations from donors to illustrate outcomes and value for money. This is not going away anytime soon. On the other hand, there is intense desire by FBOs to keep their messages to the public accessible and straightforward. Therefore, for them to keep the confidence of the public and of donors, there might be need to communicate what they have achieved, and at what cost in a clear and straightforward way. However, there is a likelihood that the way in which program and partnership management, monitoring and evaluation is done can undermine transformational development processes. Additionally, there is possibility that the public narrative of resource transfer and 'transactional' development can create support that is a 'mile wide and an inch deep.' It will be crucial to understand the way and the time to develop new ways to orthodox approaches on partnerships.

5.0 Partnerships and COVID-19

We all understand how 2020 has had a negative effect over the years with the disruptive impact of COVID-19. The devastating effect claimed the lives of over 1 million people globally and become a serious threat to many societies worldwide. We however must thank God for guiding us and providing resources during these tough times. As we came to the end of the second decade after ushering in the new millennium, we are witnessing a mix of trends in the spread of Christianity globally. It is no longer a secret that Christianity is on the decline

in Europe and America, while it's on the rise in Latin/Central America, Africa and the Middle East. This comparatively steady shift has impact on UEM and members in a number of ways.

COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on operations globally. However, it came at a time when there has been growing recognition of how crucial FBOs are to strengthening of development through an empowered civic space. At the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit FBOs were recognized for their unique and comparative advantage in humanitarian contexts. It acknowledged that FBOs:

Have both close proximity to and are part of populations affected by crises and are embedded in local communities and maintain relationships of trust and familiarity. This makes them first responders who continue to provide assistance and protection during and after crisis. Besides FBOs hold influence with national, provincial and local actors including governments and traditional leaders. Besides they share a critical responsibility and role in working for peace with the ability to facilitate sustainable behavior changes based on faith motivations and worldview.

UEM and members should provide ongoing pastoral support to communities including providing a sense of hope during and after disaster. In some crises this has been combined with training in psychosocial support, first aid and palliative care. The pandemic created stress and resulting in mental health challenges.

This was equally evident in research on "*If you need us, allow us*" back in 2018 that has aided in making non-faith development actors realize that FBOs are key to fulfillment of this SDG agenda. Many agencies are beginning to appreciate gifts and qualities are bringing to the table. When covid19 comes in shaking the global development world, FBOs got impacted in two major ways namely:

- It brought to the fore the need for partnership as we saw governments and intra-governmental institutions begin to reach out to FBOs to ask for their assistance in the COVID-19 crisis response. Social distancing and movement restriction measures deeply impacted the work of churches, CSOs and FBOs in particular.

These developments gave rise to a series of questions that form the focus of this follow-up research of the Civic Engagement Alliance that studies the role of, and space for FBOs in and post COVID-19 response.

Relations between global faith and non-faith actors during the pandemic - The pandemic demands that the north and south are implored

to cooperate, build capacity to cope with the negative impact of COVID-19.

It was interesting to see the UN secretary-general António Guterres meet with Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders back in May 2020 to rally for support in combating COVID-19. We then started to see FBO efforts towards challenging inaccurate and harmful messages, condemning the rising violence against women and girls, and activating their networks through ecumenical bodies such as WCC, AACC etc. We even saw the launch of the global Multi-Religious Faith-in-Action COVID-19 Initiative by Religions for Peace, the Joint Learning Initiative of Local Faith Communities (JLI) and UNICEF which offer hindsight on the nature of partnership with non-faith actors.

COVID-19 and North-South Relations

At various times during this crisis, global faith and non-faith actors alike have called for global solidarity. The will for FBOs to really help especially those in the south was cut short by funding challenges. It has to be remembered that: Weekly donations during religious services acutely decreased, governmental emergency funds were shifted to COVID-19 response thus none left for aid and private donors continued to face hard hitting business losses thus could not help. The pandemic highlighted both profound interconnectedness and profound inequality. It has however brought to the fore the need to hasten efforts towards interdependency rather than over-dependency. There is rising need for to develop a north-south relation based on reciprocity rather than dependency. There is likelihood that in future pandemics or such crises, the humanitarian aid aspect might still exist but it could be based more on international solidarity rather than one-directional financial aid.

6.0 Moving Forward

In the light of these trends and changes in contexts of partnerships between North and South, here are some key steps in response:

- A systematic, structured consultation of Southern Partners in the strategy and policy processes of Northern NGOs should be strengthened and consolidated. This process and similar ones need to acknowledge that although communication channels and trust has improved between and within partners; like Covey puts it trust must be kept alive as a bank account. Many partners are weary of sharing sensitive information and need assurance especially when we now work online.
- There is need to invest achieving clarity

on the values and principles that inform faith-based and even secular partnerships. There is a sense in which spirituality seems to be relegated to the back seat while diaconal becomes the center of discourse. Affirming faith and foundations of biblical values remains key for future partnership.

- Northern partners could do well to guard against the tendency to impose agendas on Southern Partners. This could be achieved through more equitable negotiation processes and safe spaces with people who understand and are ready to learn. Be the missionary make mistakes and tomorrow you are proficient in language. Why not? Failure is an option for we learn how not to fail next time.
- Invest in bringing religious youth networks into the secular policy tables alongside the secular youth networks has to be deliberately undertaken as a way to strengthen partnerships between the North and South
- There is need to focus on advocacy and engaging in politics and power, building a global culture of solidarity and the capacity of civil society in the South.
- There is need for more flexibility and responsiveness to ensure financial sustainability by planning for a new funding environment.
- There is a need for mutual assessment of the partnership relationship to be built into Northern NGO systems and procedures in order to facilitate reflection and learning from experience.
- Utilize diversity of FBOs and NGOs in promoting new forms of collaboration or mergers; shifting from a aid and service provision roles to more of an enabling role, greater emphasis on supporting the capacity development of partners; create and manage effective partnerships, influencing policy and rebuilding connections.

7.0 Conclusion/Questions

This paper has recognized that partnerships between North and South have been instrumental in contributing to socio-economic development over the years. With Northern partners playing a huge role as funders and providers of personnel for many projects in the South, it is unimaginable what the south would be like without such relations especially those communities on the margins who do not make economic sense to investors. More specifically, Churches and FBOs have been at the core of this development efforts. This is because religious organizations

have extensive vertical and horizontal networks and the resources to reach out to the vulnerable. Specifically, the church provides a theological guideline on why it is important to walk together towards a better life. For instance, the WCC has a long history of involvement in the issues addressed in the SDGs. From the Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, the Decade to Overcome Violence, Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, the pilgrimage of justice and Peace, the journey of hope, climate justice and many more. This is in line with first, the MDGs and then current efforts towards fulfillment of the SDG agenda 2030.

For a long time, these North-South Partnerships assumed a common donor-recipient approach with the North offering financial aid. This often meant that Northern partners would control the agenda. However, this too is changing as the Southern partners want a more equal partnership where their agenda is at center stage in the North that have to be addressed for better partnership and achievement of the development goals. As for the Northern partners, there has been a general trend to move from a project focus to a partner focus, based around a broad understanding of strengthening civil society organizations.

QUESTIONS

1. Alone you can achieve little; together we can achieve more. You have been part of the partnership for some time, where do you see the gaps in walking the journey together? Identify the hurdles and offer some suggestions.
2. What in your view does the UEM communion of churches north/south partners need

to sanctify them and accept who they are and do and stop being apologetic and acquiring a victim syndrome that inhibits moving forward with the vision of transforming lives? Is there space to invoke “*the power to forgive*”? – Which would enable us to forgive others and to forgive ourselves?

3. Can you affirm that you understand the aim, expectations of your partners? If yes how would you define them? If not, is it possible to manage what is not understood?
4. How can the agenda of partnership be sustained and reviewed in an inclusive manner so that it can remain relevant to the needs of different communities.
5. What one thing would you wish to change that exists from the mission /colonial time.
6. At the moment the largest group of any society namely women and girls are still on the fringes of development, leadership and spaces for decision making. While mission history was weak to acknowledge the enormous work done by women missionaries, we dare say that a lot has changed but there remain many miles to cover individually and together. What should the 2024 strategy focus on so as to fast track involvement of women as agents and agency of their empowerment and development

World Christianity has grown and shifted locations and so has partnership. Let us celebrate the blessings and acknowledge failure as part of learning.

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Since the missionary era, and especially after independence many African countries, like Tanzania has been in the forefront in addressing the poverty situation of the people. After independence in 1961, Tanzanian leadership pronounced poverty as one of the three enemies of development. The others were ignorance and diseases. Many countries in Africa continues to grapple with these

Human Development Initiative measures acute poverty by reflecting the multiple deprivations that people face at the same time in health (nutrition and child mortality rate), education (years of schooling and school attendance) and living standards (housing, cooking fuel, sanitation, water, electricity, assets).¹

There has been a wide range of discussion in addressing the issues of poverty. The majority of people in Africa still live below the poverty line and have no access to basic needs such as shelter, education, and health and sanitary services. The World Bank reports that people living below a poverty line are people who do not have enough to meet their basic needs. Such people are extremely poor with the income below \$1.90 per day.²

Most people live in systemic poverty and horrible conditions while blessed with natural resources. Although there has been recent growth that has helped Tanzania's poorest, the World Bank report emphasizes that approximately 70% of Tanzanians continue to live with less than \$2 per day, around twelve million Tanzanian

people still live in poverty, and more than four million continue to be in extreme poverty."³ The Lutheran churches in Tanzania serve people in these contexts where life is so hard and insecure. Personally I explored whether poverty is an issue when it comes to a common witness of the Gospel doing God's mission.

Signs of increasing impoverishment of larger numbers of the people abound: high unemployment rate especially among the young people, poor social infrastructure and services such as health, education, transportation, and agriculture. Resultant and connected with these are poor health and child mortality rate, hunger due to food shortage, devastating pandemics such as HIV and AIDS, cholera, malaria, and others. Sometimes poverty is due to cultural backgrounds such as superstition, laziness, witchcraft, high illiteracy, and dependency syndrome. J.J. Otim mentions that the poorest people in urban centers are found in slums and live in the conditions of extreme poverty characterized by poor shelter, malnutrition and high diseases and parasite problems, low life expectancy, and high infant mortality rate.⁴

Poverty opens avenues and acceptance of any teachings that address its solution, such as prosperity gospel. George Kinoti categorically states that poverty (especially rural poverty) is the most pressing of all Africa's problems. "It is at the heart of all the important problems

1 Msambichaka et al., 17.

2 "What Are Poverty Lines? - World Bank Group, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/video/2017/04/14/what-are-poverty-lines>? Accessed 12/10/2017

3 "Tanzania Mainland Poverty Assessment: A New Picture of Growth for Tanzania Emerges," <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tanzania/publication/tanzania-mainland-poverty-assessment-a-new-picture-of-growth-for-tanzania-emerges>, accessed 12/10/2017

4 J.J. Otim, *The Taproot of Environmental and Development Crisis in Africa* (Nairobi: ACLCA, 1992), 51.

in Africa, be they social, spiritual or moral.”⁵ Thompson explains that, being poor robs one of the ability to deal with any potential disasters, whether they are natural or caused by humans. The poor are exposed to many disasters that might happen in their community and subjected to life insecurity.⁶

In many African countries, some problems contributed by poverty are the killing of infants and albinos and possessing some of their organs as a means to bring fortune or turn poverty to richness. Some lazy parents, who think that begging is the only way of earning a living, take their children with them to the streets and introduce them to the world of begging, a very sad case of beggar–begetting–beggar. Poverty contributes to human trafficking. Young people are trafficked within the country for forced labor on farms, in mines, and in the informal business sector. Girls from rural areas are trafficked to urban centers for domestic servitude and commercial sexual exploitation. Because of poverty there is augmentation of many different movements of peace destruction that are reactionary, such as theft, house breaking, burglary, prostitution, rape, and drugs.

According to Nicholls and Wood, “What makes poverty still more painful is its social and psychological effect. The poor feel not only helpless, desperate, and hungry but they are also ashamed of themselves. They feel inferior and deprived of their human dignity. The sense of shame and indignity is subjective but depends to a great extent on the attitude of others towards them.”⁷

⁵ Belshaw, Calderisi, and Sugden, *Faith in Development. Partnership between the World Bank and the Churches in Africa*, 33.

⁶ Milburn J. Thompson, *Justice and Peace: A Christian Primer* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 31.

⁷ Bruce J. Nicholls, and Wood Beulah R. (Eds), *Sharing the Good News With the Poor: A Reader For Concerned Christians* (Bangalore: Baker House, 1996), 70.

⁸ Walbert Bühlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), 111.

However, poverty does not mean that people cannot be creative, energetic, innovative, and industrious. Poor people need encouragement and enablement that makes them to realize their potentials and be able to participate actively and confidently, being able to be innovative and creative, to recognize and use opportunities.

Of course, UEM has a great concern for the poor and do a lot of charity and development work among the marginalized and unprivileged people. The UEM has made many initiatives to address poverty. The principle strategy of the UEM for poverty alleviation appears to promote empowerments on income generating projects. The UEM has ventured into income–generating projects and microfinance, Village Community Banks (VICOBA).

The UEM raises funds for projects such as schools and hospitals and encourage her members also to raise fund from within for the sustainability and ownership. Walbert Bühlmann wrote that “in the future more stress will be laid on development, and if evangelization cannot consent to be the soul of development it will be on one side.”⁸

Fighting poverty is a multifaceted struggle. It involves a change of mindset. For this to happen, the church and society need to be equipped and empowered to understand the root causes of poverty and to take action that addresses the same.

From the Scriptures, we learn that the justice of

a society is tested and judged by its treatment of the poor. God's covenant with Israel was dependent on the way the community treated the poor and unprotected—the widow, the orphan, and the stranger (Deuteronomy 16:11–12; Exodus 22:21–27; Isaiah 1:16–17). Throughout Israel's history and in the New Testament, the poor are agents of God's transforming power. In the gospel of Luke, Jesus proclaims that he has been anointed to bring good news to the poor (4:1–22). Similarly, in the Last Judgment, we are told that we will be judged according to how we respond to the hungry, the thirsty, the prisoner, and the stranger (Matthew 25:31–46).

Normally poor people are attracted to appeals to misdealing teachings with their promises of either healing or of immediate prosperity in this life or with the promise of acquiring material benefits. Karen L. Bloomquist argued that the “prosperity gospel is popular, especially among the poor. The problem is that people want to focus on the victory, a message which touches their needs, and move too “quickly to praise.”⁹ She concluded that “drawing upon theology in fighting poverty starts by hearing the cries and laments, then hearing God's justifying word.”¹⁰

9 Karen L Bloomquist and Musa Panti Filibus, eds., “*So the Poor Have Hope, and Injustice Shuts Its Mouth*” *Poverty and the Mission of the Church in Africa* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2007), 21.

10 Bloomquist and Filibus, 22.

STEWARDSHIP OF CHURCH FINANCE

Finance is one of the basic resources in the mission of God. Finance is necessary for the church to function effectively. It covers costs when God's people go to the mission. With this Saint Paul asked, “And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’ (1Corinthians 10:15). Robert Wuthnow writes, “All income and all resources are God's. They're given to us to sustain our needs, but they are basically resources to fund his kingdom. ... Has become clear that that funding his kingdom meant supporting the church.”¹ However, this does not imply that God's mission will not be accomplished without money, rather it can be done by faithful stewards since God owns everything.

“Keeping track of money in an organized way is good stewardship all the time, but it also helps when the church wants to assess whether its resources are being deployed in a

manner consistent with the church's purposes and goals.”² The purpose of this theme is to explore the significance of financial stewardship in the Church to God's mission. “Stewardship means holding in trust, using and investing that which belongs to someone else. Christian stewardship includes that basic understanding of stewardship, but it is essentially a life of response to God for his goodness and to Jesus Christ for his love.”³

Good financial stewardship in the church is the fundamental aspect of a good relationship with God and with God's people. It addresses how the church fears, reveres, honors, and adores God. “Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase: So, shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine” (Proverbs 3: 9–10).

King David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly, saying, “Praise be to you, Lord, the God of our father Israel, from everlasting to

1 Robert Wuthnow, *The Crisis in the Churches: Spiritual Malaise, Fiscal Woe* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 149.

2 Ammerman, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, 142.

3 Turner N. Clinard, *Responding to God* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980), 25.

everlasting. Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours, Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name” (1 Chronicles 29: 10–13).

King David had a good relationship with God. It is this relationship that made people give to God. Poor stewardship in the church is a sign that the church is not growing in Christ; it is reflective also of the leadership.

Being in the administration, I have witnessed how a church’s stability is based on financial stability. The financial accountability and transparency of the church to members is a matter of utmost urgency. Church leaders, life, and ministry have been negatively affected due to widespread “rumors” on the disappearance of church funds sometimes suspected to be diverted into personal projects. It tarnishes the image of the church and waters down its prophetic voice in its local context. Rick Rouse and Craig Van Gelder argued that practicing stewardship toward building financial viability is an issue that, if not taken seriously, can become a huge obstacle to a congregation seeking to implement a missional plan. Financial challenges can also become a flash point for congregational conflict.⁴

UEM advised and support churches about being audited. However, what is required in the administration of money given to the church by God’s people for His work is not only the code of leadership which dictates the leader’s commitments and credibility, but faithfulness in the eyes of the Lord and in the eyes of God’s people. Good stewardship of church finance is determined by how the leadership in the church spends the church’s money carefully and within the approved budget. The budget provides

directions on a financial spending plan. Financial planning needs leaders to engage in planning and own the plan.

Church members need to see that what they are giving is well looked after and well used. They need the leadership to explain how the money was spent. When they are satisfied, they build trust in their leaders and are able to respond with confidence when they are asked to give. It is important to note that when church members give money in the church, they give to God who is just and faithful. Saint Paul wrote: “it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.” (1Corinthians 4: 2).

Leadership in the church is very important in the encouragement of financial faithfulness. It is the leadership which make decisions on how to spend church money. God wants leaders who are faithful and trustworthy. Christoph Stückelberger argues that “Responsible leadership must include transparent leadership. Transparency is the opposite of corruption which conducts financial transactions in darkness, ‘under the table’ and not on the table. To become corruption-free, churches have to ensure they have corruption-free church leaders.”⁵ This implies leaders who love God and treasure their life to God. Jesus constantly warned “Take heed and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses” (Luke 12:15).

Financial accountability takes the lead in the church. There are several biblical passages about financial accountability and its consequences. Jesus Christ teaches that God is pleased with the good steward and not pleased with the unfaithful steward. “There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. So, he called him and said to him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward” (Luke 16:1–2).

4 Rouse and Van Gelder, *A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation*, 110.

5 Christoph Stückelberger and N. K. Mugambi, eds., *Responsible Leadership Global and Contextual Ethical Perspectives Editors* (Geneva: Globethics.net, 2007), 180.

An Evaluation of Prosperity Gospel's Claims in the Light of Augustine's Teaching Christianity.

Modestus Lukonge

Abstract

This article uses Augustine's *Teaching Christianity* as a basis for evaluation of the teaching propagated by preachers of the Prosperity Gospel. The first part of the article is an introduction with a definition of what prosperity gospel is. The second part of the article identifies key points and teachings in *Teaching Christianity* that address problems of impure or inappropriate teaching and manners in which they may arise in Church, with emphasis on teachings propagated by proponents of prosperity gospel. The third part of the article presents some thought on how to respond to prosperity gospel, using Augustine's *Teaching Christianity* as a basis. The fourth part is the conclusion, which summarizes the first four parts of the article and gives some recommendations.

Key Words: Allegorical, Context, Hermeneutics, Literal, Metaphorical, Spiritual,

Introduction

This article undertakes an evaluation of a number of claims by preachers of prosperity gospel, which are posed as biblical truths. The aim of the article is not to critique wholesale all what prosperity gospel advocates, but to consider those of its claims that seem to run counter to the essence and core

message of the gospel, namely God's reaching out to fallen humanity. The study could be approached in using different frameworks or a combination of methods and frameworks. In this study I rely on Augustine's thought and his hermeneutical approach to the word of God as they appear in *Teaching Christianity*.¹ My choice is not based on any particular technical reason, apart from the presupposition that Augustine's hermeneutics can serve among many, as one viable informative basis for evaluating the truth claims of prosperity gospel. But what is prosperity gospel? It is a type of teaching that holds health and wealth to be a right of believers, and that believers can attain these by proper observance of tithes and other offerings particularly specified in the Old Testament (OT), combined with and 'exercising' the right kind of faith. The belief has strong affinities to Pentecostalism and in charismatic movements among evangelicals and Roman Catholics in Tanzania and elsewhere in Africa.

Key Characteristics and Claims of Prosperity Gospel

One key feature of prosperity gospel is its proponents' claim to be able to deal with all problems that afflict everyone who would care to visit their Churches and

1 Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rottele (New York: New City Press).

meetings:

Are you barren? Come to Jesus. Are you a failure? Come to Jesus. Are you poor and want prosperity? Come to Jesus. Are your plan not working for you? Come to Jesus. Are you sick? Come to Jesus. Are you being attacked? Come to Jesus. Come and be healed. Claim your inheritance and prosperity.²

Adeleye laments the fact that even hymns and choruses that used to characterised revival movements in the 1960s and 1970s have now been replaced with something else, like “I am a millionaire”, or ‘I am a winner’ and even ‘I shall not die’³. Adeleye is right in this observation, which I suggest is a result of unwarranted literal interpretation of the Bible text, especially the Old Testament (OT). This is done even where the context would suggest otherwise. In other words, prosperity gospel is a victim of a naïve literalism. By naïve here I do not merely intend to mean ignorance on part of the proclaimers, but a sense of deliberate deception is intended as well. Whether it is ignorance or sheer deception will of course be subjective and depending on the personality of the speaker. This naïve literalism would hold for instance, using biblical text for instance Deut. 28:15-18 or Jer. 11:3-4 as solid proof that barrenness, poverty and other misfortunes is a result of a familiar or occultist curse. The naïve literalism include reading the Bible on a cause and effect’ approach not unlike that of the Pharisees: if you are poor or sick it is because you are a sinner and therefore accurses.

Another character of prosperity gospel is that of naïve spiritualization. It proponents tend to hold, along with mainline Pentecostals, that a Christian is a sinless person. However both scriptures and our existential realities inform us otherwise, that we still have the potentialities for sinning and do in fact sin. The prosperity hermeneutic is unwarrantedly anthropocentric and literalistic. Therefore for its proponents use literally phrases like ‘we are gods’, taking from texts like Ps. 82: 6 and 1Jn. 3:1; 5:1&4 as typical proof texts.

Prosperity gospel emphasizes so much on the law (the torch), even though it is selective in its application of the law. Widely promoted are texts that prescribe various ordinances for sacrifices and for the altar. So there is the ‘altar of prayer’⁴,

2 Femi Adeleye, *Preachers of a Different Gospel* (Nairobi and Grand Rapids: African Christian Textbooks and Zondervan, 2011), 2.

3 Ibid., 3.

4 According to a teaching on Sunday November 22, 2020 at Bethel Lutheran Parish, Mbeya, Tanzania, which I attended as a participant observer.

5 The tendency would be to put it at ten percent of everything. Profits for small shopkeepers however, would be roughly at the same level in Tanzania, making the requirement very legalistic. This leave people with guilt consciences if they believe the teaching but cannot meet this requirement.

6 R. Jerome Boone, “Pentecostal Worship and hermeneutics,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 26 (2017): 123. Even though Boone refers to some (positive) influence of Pentecostalism among mainline evangelicals, what he does not admit, but is all too obvious, is that the influence has come at the cost admitting ‘excess baggage’ in form of many horrific claims of prosperity gospel involving health and wealth. Further, his analysis is rather flawed when he assumes that the sovereignty of God is constrained or missing in forms of Christian worship other than that of Pentecostalism. The claim amounts to conditioning God to this or that form of presence and response to genuine seekers, which take from His sovereignty even as it claims to accord him that sovereignty.

‘the personal altar of the presence of God’ and the altar on which one sacrifices one’s ‘offerings’. For practical reasons however, offerings and sacrifices too need to be modified to suite contemporary context. Produce of the land and from livestock is accepted and encouraged. However and since the hearers of prosperity gospel are mainly in large cities and towns, emphasis is put on monetary offerings. Some preachers I have been able to listen to would then interpret most of the OT offerings requirements, especially those in the text of Lev. 23:10 in terms that apply to modern trading and markets. For instance, shop merchandise and one’s first salary, are considered legitimate first fruits and so encouraged, even though it is not clear what portion of the shop merchandise one should give, and of what commodities.⁵

Prosperity gospel, at least as proclaimed in Tanzania, never concerns itself with the message of the cross. It would not be unsurprising to hear a message from the OT for two months running in Tanzania, not only in the Pentecostal Churches, but among Lutherans and other evangelicals as well:

Some Evangelicals have been influenced by elements of the Charismatic movement, making them open to the sovereign freedom of God to intervene directly into human lives and meet human needs...Pentecostals have gained much greater respect for mainline Christians in the reformed tradition during their development as a movement⁶

Prosperity gospel negates the efficacious saving and redeeming work of Christ at Calvary. This denial is not obvious, and it can be admitted here that even the preachers of prosperity gospel themselves may not be aware of this form of straying away. The negation and denial comes in form of demands to ‘do something’ or ‘meet a certain requirement’ for one to be in right relationship with God, and for one to be heard in prayer. These additional requirements include contentions advanced by some preachers that one must redeem one’s firstborn male, following Ex. 13:13; that one must tithe according to the OT or else one is sinning, following Deut. 14:22; and that one needs prayers for release from familial curses (hence denying the efficacy of baptism and its sacramental essence).

One central teaching of prosperity gospel is its emphasis on 'sowing and reaping. The proof text is 2Cor. 9:6-8. The teaching as propagated by preachers of prosperity claims that proportional reward goes to those who give bountifully. As a result, hearers are always restless in their hearts as to whether they have really given enough. God becomes the average greed individual who wants more and more in order to give more and more. Sowing generously is closely connected to the teachings that both the offering and prayer that have to be channelled through the 'man/woman of God' and not otherwise. This is obviously intended both to keep numbers in the congregation from going down and to avert the risk of offerings going to competitors. A number of prominent preachers in Tanzania have used this tactic in the 2010s to subtly discourage their hearers from being faithful to their parishes. An answered prayer, it is further claimed, demands a gift of thank you to God. That gratitude to God has to go to 'an altar that knows you', as they put it. Taking one's thanksgiving gift to another parish or itinerant preacher, it is said, is useless since 'the other altar will not recognize the faithful as having been attended on this altar.' With such subtle tricks, it is almost made to sound as if a person has made a mistake of paying one's medical bills to a different hospital from the one that he or she attended.

Emphasis on dreams and nightmares as signs of either God or the devil working on one's life. 'Good', dreams are said to foretell good fortunes or direct God's will and intention for the subject. 'Bad' dreams to the contrary, do either foretell ongoing spiritual warfare or give warnings from God. While this can be either related to the spiritual realm or be just psychic experiences explainable psychologically, proponents of prosperity gospel consign all dreams and nightmares to the spiritual dimension, without allowing even the smallest room to the possibility of explanation through medical accounts.

Above, I have sketched the phenomena and characteristics of prosperity gospel using the Tanzania context. One issue needs to be mentioned though, before we move to the next section. Social trends involving the more influential among proponents and adherents of prosperity gospel indicate well that not everything is well in the camp. One is the penchant for, and exhibition of excessive opulence of the preachers. The other is the flamboyance exhibited by the most successful among preachers of prosperity gospel. The third one, which is only a recent trend of the year 2019 and 2020, is that some preachers are increasingly distancing themselves from prosperity gospel. Some of these are former proponents of prosperity gospel.⁷ We need to ask therefore whether

the teachings are genuine gospel, and whether the Bible texts on which they are premised are interpreted appropriately and adequately. As mentioned in the introduction, Augustine's thought will form the basis of my reflection in this section.

Augustine on How to Teach the Word of God to Christians

In addressing the topic on what Augustine stands for insofar as teaching Christians is concerned, I propose that there is a key question in his discourse, namely: What is the purpose of study of scripture? This key question raises other subsidiary questions as follows: What should be taught by Christian teachers? Who has to deliver the teaching? In what manner? While there would be many other relevant questions on this topic, I limit myself to only this main question and the three subsidiary questions, for the sake of space. The article is structured along Augustine's *Teaching Christianity* as its basis, even though other theologians, especially from the period of the Reformation are briefly considered as well.

Let's consider the first question. For Augustine, Studying scriptures entails understanding communicating meaning of scripture: "There are two things which all treatment of scriptures aim at: a way to discover what needs to be understood, and a way to put across to others what has been understood".⁸ For Augustine therefore, any other aim is either excluded, or remains secondary and is left on the fringes. I hold it here that it is for this reason that Augustine proceeds towards his schema that divides all 'things' into two broad groups. This he begins by asserting that all teaching entails either things or signs.⁹ Things are those that signify what we would call today materials or matter, while signs are figurative or metaphorical expressions, which includes physical material used in figurative sense (for instance when we say bread on the altar is 'the body of Christ', or that the rock from which Israelites drank in the desert (...) was 'Christ'. Next he divides things into those for enjoyment (Lat. *frui*) and things for use (*uti*).¹⁰ It is from the second term that we get the English term utility, with its usefulness in economics and social ethics. Human beings have to use, in the right manner, all things given by God:

We ourselves however, both enjoy and use things, and find ourselves in the middle in a position to choose which to do. So if we wish to enjoy things that are meant to be used we are impeding our own progress, and sometimes are also deflected from our course, because we are thereby delayed in obtaining what we should be enjoying. Or turned back from it altogether, blocked by our love for inferior

7 Sylvester Gamanywa, "Zaka/Fungu la Kumi: hatutoi ili Tubarikiwe" (Offeratories and Tithes: We do not Give in Order to be Blessed) in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TzDB9r6PzoE> as of Dec. 23, 2020. Gamanywa seems to be distancing himself from prosperity and health messages that characterized the earlier phase of his ministry in the 1990s and 2000s. It is worth noting that he is a Christian Zionist who propagates another message that economic prosperity of Tanzania is connected to Israel. He is therefore not entirely exonerated by the retraction in this YouTube video.

8 Augustine, Book I, para 1(1).

9 Ibid., para 2(2).

10 Ibid., para. 3(3).

signs.¹¹

Augustine proceeds that only God is to be enjoyed and all other, that is material possessions, ought just to be used—in the right manner:

Enjoyment after all, consists in clinging to something lovingly for its own sake, while use consists in referring what has come your way to what to what to what your love aims at obtaining, provided, that is, it deserves to be loved. Because, unlawful use, surely, should rather be termed as abuse or misuse.¹²

This distinction in Augustine is crucial to our discussions in this article, as it touches on the key issue, namely whether actions and motives in prosperity gospel aim at use of things or enjoyment of them. We will return to this point and evaluate the situation on the basis of utterances and writings by proponents of prosperity gospel.

We will now consider our first subsidiary question. What should be taught to Christians? This question has another one embedded in it; what has to be learnt by whoever seeks to study scriptures? Here Augustine presents several valuable concepts that the student of scriptures ought to take to heart. One is that While God is to be enjoyed, he is inexpressible. He is a mystery in Himself; a mystery before which we can only stand in awe and amazement: “All I feel I have done is to wish to say something; but if I have said anything, it is not what I wished to say. How do I know this? I know it because God is inexpressible...”¹³ Paul Ricouer echoes the same feeling over about sixteen centuries later when he describes the complexities of understanding and describing God: “The naming of God, in the original expression of the faith, is not simple but multiple”¹⁴, and “Thus God is named in diverse ways in narration that recounts the divine acts, prophecy that speak in the divine name, prescription that designates God as the source of the imperative, wisdom that seeks God as the meaning of meaning, and hymn that invoke God in the second person.”¹⁵ In other words, knowing an expressing God cannot be attempted apart of Him and for Him, if we have to avoid misunderstanding, misinterpreting and misusing Him, His message and His name.

What Augustine, and Ricouer nearly sixteen centuries after him partly make us aware of is that while studying scriptures and teaching them is necessary and actually an imperative on Christians, it is not easy and it must focus on God and Him alone. Teaching Christians ought therefore to observe this rule:

Well, that’s how it is in this mortal life...we have to use this world [*uti*], not to enjoy it [*frui*], so that we may behold *the invisible things of God, brought to our knowledge through the things that have been made*

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., para 4(4).

13 Ibid., para 6(6).

14 Paul Ricouer, *Figuring the Sacred* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1995): 224

15 Ibid., 227.

16 Augustine, Book I, para 4(4).

17 Augustine, Book I, para 8, 8.

18 Augustine, *ibid.*, para 12(1).

(Rom. 1:20); that is, so that we may proceed from temporal and bodily things to grasp those that are eternal and spiritual.¹⁶

What has to be learnt and thereafter taught therefore, is on spiritual things, with the student-teachers constantly aware first of all, that they are weak human beings and second, that scripture contains some difficulties that need to be handled carefully and studiously. Prosperity gospel tends to point its hearers to enjoying the world. It further glosses over the difficulties associate with studying and teaching scriptures; with its attractive appeal to the preachers being ‘enlightened by the Spirit.’ The difficulties include how to handle metaphors, allegories and promises of God in the light of real-life difficulties. We will take up this point later on in this article when we discuss ambiguities in scriptures. Prosperity gospel tends to focus on the here and now, the misuse of things. That leads to the use of God, instead of enjoying Him. This occurs when material prosperity is given attention at the expense of ignoring spiritual things. But what are the spiritual things to be taught? Augustine labors with the question at length, presenting us with vivid examples of these spiritual things that ought to be the focus of any preaching and any reaching in Church.

The first one is that God is unchangeable wisdom.¹⁷ We note that he does not say God *has* wisdom, but that He is wisdom. This is very important. Proper teaching ought to direct hearers to God, who is not merely a fount of wisdom, but is the whole embodiment and the full complexity we call wisdom. Prosperity gospel tend to undermine this when it subtly coaxes the hearer to regard the preacher or evangelist as the ‘man of God’. One such example is the late T.B Joshua, a prominent preacher in Nigeria whose teachings were loaded with elements of prosperity gospel, had designated the title of ‘wise men’ to a group of seven assistants, who are the equivalent of deacons in the New Testament. Such a designation may not be harmful on the surface. However it risks leading hearers into regarding the ‘seven wise men’ as really wise, which culminate into seeing them as the source of wise counsel to the recipients of the message.

The second is that we cannot see God unless the mind is purified, as we can note from Jesus Christ himself, he Son of God, in line with the Lord’s own words: “No one has seen the Father, except the one who is from God, only he has seen the Father” (Jn. 6:46). In His wisdom, God chose to take our infirmities through the incarnation: “But the foolishness of God is wiser than men.”¹⁸ Prosperity gospel tends to mislead its hearers into assuming that if they see the preacher, they have met God, or are closest to an agency that mediates them with God. It is undeniable that prosperity gospel has

strong evangelical heritage and is strictly Pentecostal in theological leaning. Because of that, it is extremely averse to Roman Catholic theology that requires a priest to mediate, on behalf of Christ, between God and the sinful people of God. Despite this aversion to priestly mediation, proponents of prosperity gospel tend to point people to 'the man/woman of God'; or 'the prophet'. Yet Augustine reminds us, that we cannot see God unless our minds are purified. A valid question remains however: How are the minds to be purified? The answer is, God himself purifies the mind, with the agency of our repentance, prayer for forgiveness and constant reading and meditation on the word. It is for this reason that Augustine exhorts a preacher to pray before preaching.¹⁹ The preacher acts as an agency for proclamation. But being a human agency, he or she is fraught with the weaknesses of the body. So, merely proclaiming that one is led by the Spirit is a dangerous thing. One needs to pray for God's leadership, and for wisdom and discernment of the Holy Spirit on what to say and in what manner while preaching. It is for this reason that what Boone contends²⁰, that there comes a moment when the Spirit 'comes' to a service and the leader lets the Spirit take control, is questionable. An alternative position for instance, would be to believe that the Spirit will guide any sincere, prayerful and studious person in their Bible reading and preaching, however inadequate they may see themselves to be. To assume that the Spirit 'descends at a particular moment is to believe almost like Sabellians or modalists, who believed and taught that the trinity are three modes of God's self-revelation, thus posing a question of absence of unity within the Godhead. Augustine continues:

So is it too, that from the ministrations of holy men, or even holy angels, nobody can correctly learn what is involved in living with God, unless he has been made docile to God by God, who is asked in the Psalm, *Teach me to do your will, since you are my God* (Ps. 143:10).²¹

We may take the exhortation to pray as applying not only to the preacher, but to every believer. But proponents of prosperity gospel twist this exhortation, arguing people instead to 'come to the preacher' so as to be healed; prospered or cleansed of familial curses. As a result, the mediator and intercessor between God and humans ceases to be the man Jesus Christ, with his role taken by the preacher of prosperity gospel and in effect thus recreating the OT priestly system, or something close to the Roman Catholic system. In Tanzania, it is not infrequent that one hears on FM radio stations and on TV, calls like 'send your offering to this phone number and I will pray for your need. Remember to write an SMS stating your need, or come in person with your gift. Please make sure you bring a generous gift that pleases the Lord'. The problem here is that

people are not encourage to pray, but to 'pay per prayer session'. The situation has degenerated so much to the point that some people tend to no longer pray for themselves and for others, in line with the exhortation by Paul (Eph. 6:18; Phl. 1:4; Col. 1:3; 4:3; 1Thes. 5:25; 2Thes. 1:11; 3:1), but instead pay in order to be prayed for.

The third thing to be taught is that God's wisdom came to us and healed us. Here Augustine points to the incarnation. God could have continued with the OT order with its sacrificial system and ministrations. But these were just signs pointing to Christ, and were therefore inadequate. So He sent his only begotten Son. Preachers should therefore instruct themselves in this crucial point and understand the message of different scriptures regarding it. Augustine quotes Paul's epistle: "*For because in the wisdom of God the world was unable to come to know God through wisdom, it was God's pleasure through the folly of the preaching to save those who believe* 1Cor. 1:21)."²² Three points out to be mentioned. One, the first 'wisdom' in the verse is the wisdom of God. Two, the second wisdom is the fallen wisdom of humanity. Three, the folly of the preaching is the preaching of the crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Paul argues that to the Jew, this is a stumbling block (for one hung on a tree is accursed Gal. 3:13); to the Greek it is folly (for in their schema, salvation was thought of as attainable differently, depending on which philosophical or metaphysical school one belonged (1Cor. 1:23). Now Paul writes, and Augustine emphasizes, that it is precisely this apparently foolish idea and event that saves humankind; when it is preached and believed. The preacher should have it and no other as the goal, to meditate on it and to preach it constantly. Proponents of prosperity gospel however, seem to be either ashamed of, or indifferent to this core activity of the preacher and pastor. As a result they put so much emphasis on proper relationship with God through giving, paying tithes, and as a means of right standing with god, and that with the aim of gaining material wealth and physical health. Here too, prosperity gospel misses the mark and needs the corrective that we gain insight of by referring to Augustine.

The point Augustine is emphasizing here is that the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ are models for our own spiritual death and resurrection in the body.²³ He uses the illustration to refer not only to the death and the resurrection at the end of the World, but to *present* death and resurrection. Proponents of prosperity gospel accept the resurrection of the body at the end times. And since prosperity is not in terms of material possessions only, but in physical health and longevity as well, their claims tend to question even the inevitability of physical death.²⁴ Because of that, some proponents of this gospel tend to coax their followers into the

19 Augustine, Book IV, para 15(32).

20 Boone *ibid*, 111-2.

21 Augustine, Book IV, para 16, 33(3). Emphasis supplied.

22 Augustine, *ibid*., Book I, para 12(1)

23 Augustine, Book I, para 15(14); 19(18).

24 Adeleye, *ibid*., 3.

belief that believers should not die, and infirmities ought to be things of the past for those who truly believe. In Tanzania, some prominent preachers of this gospel have been known to conduct 'resurrection services,' in which alleged corpses of dead persons are brought into the church during a service, in shrouds, supposedly dead and directly from the morgue. Else, persons who have died months or even years before are alleged to have had their souls²⁵ 'stolen' and that they can be restored to their life state. It is understandable how such teachings may be well received in a society like the African one, whose metaphysics accepts existence either witchcraft, the Bible or both. This drives them to believe that their dead relative is not really dead, but that evil people have 'stolen' their relative's *nafsi/nephesh*; such that it is possible to bring them back through prayer. The stealing of *nafs* is said to occur even when someone is suffering from some psychosomatic or psychiatric illnesses like depression or schizophrenia. The remedy is not seeing a psychologist or psychiatrist, or even a Christian counselor, but prayer for the *Nafisi/nephesh* to be restored to the patient.

It is safe to argue that prosperity gospel make use of these socio-cultural, psychiatric or anthropological phenomena to lure people into paying money to preachers so as to have their long relatives 'brought back to life', with false 'resurrection' parades of persons alleged to have been brought from the morgues to Churches during worship services. I am not aware of specific theological or sociological-religious studies that have been conducted on the genuineness of these resurrections. Further, these miracles have never been verified by independent secular researchers or investigative media, and no one has ever come forward testifying that they themselves or their relatives have been resurrected. It is safer up to now therefore, to regard these miracles to be hoaxes.

The hoax explanation is given credence by the fact that the preachers with time find something else to do in the same churches, open big businesses or even join politics. The businesses at times follow a very sensible business logic. The Nigerian prophet T.B Joshua built a factory that produces canisters with pressurized water for the use of his followers, who purchase them at prices of up to USD 50. A Tanzanian minion has emulated him opening a similar factory for bottled blessed waters. Enterprising could not be at a higher feat. Particularly when it is coupled with promises of longevity. But what do scriptures tell us about our present life and imminent death? Scriptures give ample evidence on the reality and inevitableness of illnesses, infirmities and imminent physical death (Gen. 3: 19; Heb. 9:27). Genuine teaching of Christian should not seek to downplay or gloss over this reality or lead people into a false comfort.

Another point regarding present dying is that

the force of some of the texts call upon us to 'die his death' while we continue to exist physically. This is existential in character, as it calls on us to die by way of changing our way of existing on earth (Eph. 4:17; Col. 3:5; Rom. 12:2). Christians are said to have died to sin (Col. 2:20; Rom. 6:2) and to have crucified the body with its old nature. This entails constant exercise, one times succeeding, the other time faltering, even stumbling, but pressing on. It calls on a number of practical exercises including changing our attitudes towards material possessions and wealth. It is here, in the dying to the world, that Augustine's distinction on using and enjoying things becomes very crucial. Material possessions, whether we gather them ourselves, or are bequeathed on us by parents or are given as gifts by someone else, ought to just be used. Proponents of prosperity however tend to invite its hearers to enjoy the material possessions. It is therefore a false gospel, a gospel contrary to the true gospel. Because it is a false gospel, it give inadequate attention, sometimes none at all, to this dying to the self and to the world. Instead, it calls on enjoying the things of life. Augustine illuminates us abundantly when he reminds us that what God has created, including our own lives, is to be used, not enjoyed.

Fourth, God alone is to be enjoyed.²⁶ This, as said above, has to do with dying to ourselves and to the world. When we do away with the old nature, we can enjoy God alone and *use* things in the proper way. However, if we do not die to ourselves, we constantly yearn to reverse the proper order of things: We seek to *enjoy* things instead of *using* them, and *use* God instead of *enjoying* Him. We see this too clearly in calls by proponents of prosperity gospel to 'appropriate the promises,' 'no more illnesses,' 'no more poverty,' and so forth. We see it in the pomp, flamboyance, lavish styles in house, car and dress among the most prominent among these preachers. Not only that, not a few among them who succeed in amassing wealth end up being embroiled in scandal after scandal. This is not to say there are no scandals among evangelicals, independents and Roman Catholics. Far from that, it is to emphasize that earthly possessions are for temporal needs only, and when we accumulate them for their own sake, or to prove that God is on our side, we end up enjoying them instead of enjoying God, Augustine argues is the only one to be enjoyed.

The fifth point that ought to be taught is that since God is who He is, he enjoys us and uses us. We are permitted to only enjoy him, but he has this freedom in Himself to enjoy us and use us. He enjoys us as the chief end for creating us. He uses us as a means to His purpose, and further as the end for existence. This purpose embodies and entails our worship of Him, our extending of His love to our fellow human beings, our self-improvement and our improving and caring for the environment,

25 The Swahili language of East Central Africa borrows from the Arabic (a Semitic language like Hebrew) on the concept of the person. Thus, What is translated as soul in English, which is roughly *ψυχή* in the Greek, is *nafsi* in Swahili, which connotes the same idea as *nephesh* in Hebrew and its Arabic. In much of African ontology, like in Jewish settings, a person is a whole, a *nephesh*, and not body, soul and spirit as in the Greco-Roman metaphysics.

26 Augustine, Book I, para 5, 5.

among others. These means by which he uses us constitute part of, but are not the sole means, of our enjoying Him. While it is true that He promises to prosper us and give us health (Jn. 14:18), these are not central, such that scripture is replete with narratives of many characters who enjoyed God in the face of infirmities, suffering, trials and temptations, even lack of physical needs, for instance the apostle Paul. Prosperity gospel tempts us to believe that if you are accepted before God, there will be no suffering, no poverty, no illness, even no persecution. But again, scriptures teach us to the contrary (Jn. 16:33). Teaching Christianity ought to constantly hammer this point home, that we are created to enjoy God, not to enjoy what he has created for our use.

Six, God calls us to the right order of love. Scriptures teach us that God is love, and that we have to love him with the whole heart, soul, mind and energies; and that we have to love our neighbors as ourselves. According to Augustine, the commandment includes, in proper order, all that is to be loved. This includes loving oneself as a neighbor, and having the order of things right. However, Augustine's view on the order of love clearly poses some questions.²⁷ It does not recommend what I prefer to call *the ethical principal of immediacy*, which may permit one to pay more attention to one's family or parents when there is a charitable deed to be done and one is faced with an ethical dilemma. Augustine and Aquinas's problematic proposals aside, love entails permitting ourselves to be of service to others.

The seventh point to be emphasized is that

27 Augustine's proposal that charity should be given to chance like tossing a coin is problematic as it does not accord with human realities and affinities to those who have special connection to us, as contrasted with all the others—for instance one's blood relatives. A similar problematic in handling love properly is by Thomas Aquinas, who proposed that love of parents should precede that of children, and love of a father that of a mother. One should probably adopt Luther's order that love of a parent or child should weigh heavier than love of a stranger, even though parents or children and strangers ought to be loved. The question of 'equality' should not be the central point as if we could quantify the notion and act of love.

28 Casinos and gambling houses and cafes are a typical example, with their addictive character that deceive people into believing they can make it in life without having to work at all, but in the end impoverish most of those who indulge.

29 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ponzi_scheme, as on Dec. 23, 2020. Ponzi schemes are a form of investment fraud that takes its name from Charles Ponzi, an Italian American who is known to have made them very popular. The schemes were known to have existed in the United States from around 1869. They entail letting earlier investors profit from investments made by later investor lured in a scheme, which is however a fraud. Preachers of prosperity gospel have practiced such scams in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, leading some people into poverty, debt, and even death from shock and heart related illnesses.

30 A larger scale form of Ponzi scheme. Preachers of prosperity gospel have practiced such scams in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda from around 2005 through the 2010s, driving people, some of them pensioners; into poverty, debt, and even death from shock and heart related illnesses.

31 A subtle form of pyramid scheme which is less fraudulent in that it provides products, some of them very genuine ones, through specific individuals in an open system that is similar to a pyramid scheme, such that most of profits are channeled to a few individuals at the top of the membership pyramid.

32 Because of these promotions, a contradiction has arisen, as exemplified by one prominent preacher in Tanzania who began with healing sessions, only to end up promoting and selling computers that 'can diagnose all illnesses.' I fact-checked this claim with three experts in medical fields. All three were working with a medical university in Tanzania and attending Church in my parish at that time. One was a professor of anatomy, another of gynecology and the third a pharmacist. All three confirmed that up to the time (in 2011), there was no medical equipment that could diagnose all illnesses. Yet not a few people believed the lie

God calls us to love neighbor. The Lord Himself taught us on what a neighbor is. It is instructive to note that the Common Law system in the Commonwealth countries have a doctrine called 'the biblical neighbors principle.' Taking its philosophical undergirding from the narrative of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37). The principle states roughly that: 'my neighbor is anyone whose actions affect me and who will be affected by my actions.' The principle therefore guides the effect of an action as creating neighborly relationships. Teaching Christianity ought to take into account this dimension as well. We are living in a world where huge business investments, mostly from Northern Europe, China and the USA uproot people from their homes and agricultural land and cause serious pollution. We live a reality where fuel guzzling posh cars add immensely to pollution and global warming. We live in a reality where capitalism increasingly seduce people into consumer products that are really wants than needs²⁸, where Ponzi schemes²⁹, pyramid schemes³⁰ and multilayered marketing strategies³¹ daily impoverish people. Yet prosperity gospel has not only condoned the practices, but in Tanzania and elsewhere in the World, the mega churches and smaller ones have been the very platforms for promoting these schemes. The idea is to help people prosper, without regards to ethical norms of doing business. The pulpit partly becomes a space for business promotional activities. This includes promoting medical cures that, it is claimed, can treat most, if not all diseases.³²

Augustine on Qualifications for Teaching Christians

Having surveyed Augustine on what has to be taught to Christians, and in what manner, we are now in position to dwell briefly on the qualification of the teacher. This is crucial, since in similar fashion to the mainstream Pentecostals³³, prosperity gospel tends to have an aversion towards 'book knowledge', instead taking the position that teaching and preaching is a Spirit-led activity. We saw this in the views of Boone³⁴ above. Yet Augustine has very useful tips on qualifications of a Christian teacher

First of all, it has to be someone well versed in scriptures and their different orders and kinds, the manner in which they are written, and what is needed in order to understand them. Here we return again to Augustine's concept of things and signs. Things are to be considered as they are and what they are, and no attempt should be made to look further to see if they signify anything else.³⁵ When one sees a lion for instance, one should not venture into an activity that will enable one to discover if there is something behind the lion, which needs to be discovered. It is a lion, not a sign or symbol of something else. It is a different matter however, with signs. He gives two examples, that smoke is a sign that there is a fire where the smoke comes from, and a cry of an animal signifies its mood³⁶, or as we will say today, its instinctual disposition. He then applies the idea of signs to written texts:

But because words immediately pass once they have agitated the air wave, and last no longer than the sound they make, letters were invented as signs of words. Thus spoken utterances can be shown to the eyes, not in themselves, but through what are signs of them.³⁷

The scriptures are food for our spiritual hunger: "Magnificent and salutary, therefore, is the way the Holy Spirit so adjusted the holy scriptures,

that they ward off starvation with the clearer passages, while driving away boredom with the obscure ones."³⁸ Here Augustine argues that both the clear texts and obscure ones are equally valid and needed, with the clear ones enabling us to know the message plainly, and the obscure ones giving us the joy of laboring our minds to decipher them. In other words, while scriptures are loaded with ambiguities and obscurities, a reader should not give up and take the ambiguities lightly, but he or she exert energy, skill and intelligence to get the meaning behind text. Otherwise, all those who reads scripture lightly risks being misled.³⁹ Augustine argues that the obscurities and ambiguities are intended to break human pride and get us into hard labor instead.⁴⁰ He then what is required to understand scriptures, to paraphrase: First to be converted by the fear of God, second to grow in modesty and piety, third, to discover oneself in scriptures the knowledge of God; which revolves around abandoning love of the world and embracing love of God instead.⁴¹ This demands an understanding of the for instance that moves on to the stage of discovering, of knowledge, calls for understanding the various genres of scriptures: metaphors⁴², allegories⁴³, figurative speeches⁴⁴, narratives⁴⁵, histories⁴⁶, parables⁴⁷, proverbs⁴⁸, wisdom writings⁴⁹, apocalyptic⁵⁰ text and many others. Failure to distinguish these various genres lead to wrong understandings and wrong teaching in turn. Deliberate application of figurative and metaphorical verses amount to deception and manipulation. When preachers of prosperity gospel say for instance: 'you reap what you sow', and use that to invite people to give generously, with the collection going into the private accounts of the preachers, that is sheer deception and manipulation. A careful reading will clearly show that it was intended to help the hearers guard against complacency once they have entered Canaan and had prospered. When it is used to just teach that God is a God who gives us strength to

by that bishop and paid for the diagnoses.

33 There is a development however in which Pentecostals are increasingly seeing the need for some training of their pastors and preaches in the key areas highlighted in this section.

34 Boone *ibid*, 111-2.

35 Augustine, Book II, para 1, 1-3.

36 *Ibid*.

37 *Ibid.*, para 4(5).

38 *Ibid.*, para 8(2).

39 *Ibid.*, para 6(7).

40 *Ibid*.

41 Augustine, Book II, para 7(9).

42 Augustine, Book III, para 5(9).

43 *Ibid.*, Book III, para 11(17)/2.

44 *Ibid*.

45 *Ibid.*, Book II, para 29(45).

46 *Ibid.*, para 44.

47 *Ibid.*, Book III, 29(40)/2

48 *Ibid.*, Book II, para 13/2.

49 *Ibid*.

50 *Ibid.*, para 13(3).

prosper, that becomes either deliberate lying, or inadvertently misleading, but most likely the former.

Augustine points out the need for the preacher to have some knowledge of original languages, namely Hebrew and Greek, and the difference between Latin translations and the Greek originals. This includes the Hebrew OT when compared with the Greek Septuagint translation.⁵¹ To this requirement he adds the need for knowledge of historical matters and chronology in both secular and religious history.⁵² Someone who does not know anything about the inter-testamental period may have a difficulty understanding the distinction between the temple and the synagogues, and how the order of worship differed between the two.⁵³ Augustine therefore warns against enslavement to the letters. This problem is noted all too well in in sermons and teachings by preachers of prosperity gospel, who tend to take scripture too literally even here not warranted. Further useful tips he gives us is on rhetorical skills and eloquence of speech.⁵⁴ To their credit, preachers of prosperity gospel hardly lack in those, and one can hardly accuse them of not being prayerful. But one other point applies here not only to them, but to us all. Augustine says a preacher should be one whose actual life bears with what one preaches.⁵⁵ As mentioned earlier above scandals that have rocked prosperity gospel preachers—sex improprieties, lack of financial transparency, tax evasions, cult figure-like leadership, alcoholism and gambling; should warn us all on the danger of this type of gospel. Again, this with the rest of the body of Christ being wary of the ‘holier than thou’ attitude.

Conclusions and recommendations

In this article I have attempted an evaluation of prosperity gospel, using Augustine’s *Teaching Christianity* as the basis of my reflection. I have argued that prosperity gospel is problematic in that it puts the preacher and not Jesus Christ at the center; it focuses on wealth and health at the expense of the cross and the message of salvation; it ignores key hermeneutical issues like distinction of texts among different genres; it ignores historical and linguistic issues; and it poses claims that are unscriptural like the notion that underplays or pretends to ignore the inevitability of illnesses, suffering and death.

51 Ibid., para 11

52 Ibid., para 39(58)/2

53 For instance the fact that no sacrifices could be made in a synagogue, and money received in synagogues in the diaspora could not be aid to the temple treasury, but could be used for social services in the diaspora, since it was regarded as being profane.

54 Ibid., para 36(54).

55 Ibid., Book IV, paras 27(59), 60 and 28(61)

Augustine’s *Teaching Christianity* teaches us on the realities of want or lack, the promises for our provisions and our utter dependence on God. It also reminds us on the need for proper studying of scriptures and prayer in trust of God. The reality of want and helplessness is to be counterbalanced with numerous promises of God’s protect and care of the faithful, instead of doing as prosperity does, by misusing scriptures and in effect, using God instead of enjoying him. Two recommendations can be made here. One, the Church, including those in prosperity gospel, ought to reappraise the teachings so as to reaffirm the centrality of Jesus and His free salvation for humanity. Two, those entrusted with care of congregations ought to focus more on Bible studies and other forms of lifelong Christian education of the congregations, not only in Sunday services, but in other programs as well: for Children, youth, women and men. This should include putting more energies on various forms of social action or diaconical work that takes into account the need groups in the parishes.

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Africa Regional Board of UEM met in Douala

The UEM Africa Regional Board is being held from 9th to 12th October, 2023 hosted by Evangelical Church of Cameroon (EEC). All board members arrived safely and the meeting has started. The Chairperson of the ARB welcomed all the board members to share the reports from their respective churches. The official opening has been done by the host church lead by Rev. Billa Mbenga the President of the Church. The meeting is going on and UEM Co-workers are sharing their report on the implementation of joint programs and office operation in general.

Supporting Each Other - in Prayer and Action

At the invitation of the Evangelical Church in Cameroon (Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun, EEC), the Africa Regional Board of UEM met in Douala, Cameroon, from October 8-11, 2023. The regional governing body is composed of the four African Council members, as well as five other elected delegates from African member churches and the Moderator of UEM, Bishop Dr Abednego Keshomshahara.

The ten board members discussed the work reports presented by the UEM Africa Department. Here, the staff of the UEM offices in Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) and Wuppertal (Germany) provided information on the progress of activities in the region, which were decided by the 2022 General Assembly in Villigst (Germany) and the African Regional Assembly last March in Dar es Salaam.

Church in Cameroon has overcome the crisis

In addition, for the first time, there was a renewed opportunity for collaboration with the EEC host church, which was in crisis from 2017 to 2022. "Five years ago, I last visited the EEC church. Given the severe crisis the church was facing at the time, the UEM family was in danger of losing the EEC as a member. But the UEM members have continually prayed for the church. And today, we are here with joy to thank God that since December 2022, the

church members and the EEC leadership are on the good path of reconciliation and that the church in Cameroon is again holistically serving its members in all areas through various social projects," said the UEM General Secretary, Rev. Volker Martin Dally.

The board members also discussed the current situation in the African churches they represent. It was noted that many aspects of the daily work in the African member churches focus on the five areas of work of UEM, namely Evangelism, Diakonia, Advocacy, Development and Partnership. In addition, African churches were encouraged to have more ownership and participation within the UEM communion.

Call for unity in mission

The regional board also made landmark decisions regarding the regional program work of UEM, which is supported by church leaders. Their commitment to solidarity is also expressed in prayers and visits, pursuing the common goal of church mission. "It is important for the members of UEM to support and strengthen each other in daily prayer and through concrete humanitarian action. This is especially necessary at a time of high global inflation and terrible human suffering caused by wars and conflicts in some countries, for example in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Ukraine by Russia, as well as the recent open attacks between Israel and Hamas. All the related challenges are negatively impacting the well-being of the world's



population and the African continent in particular in many ways,” said the Tanzanian Moderator of UEM, Bishop Keshomshahara.

Moreover, the board decided to mobilize African members to build reserves in order to support each other in the event of man-made or natural disasters. Prior to the board meeting, the UEM had already organized a workshop on disaster management in Douala. The aim was to train the African member churches for a more effective disaster preparedness. The EEC church set a good example after the workshop by establishing so-called JPIC groups, which are now in place in all 22 church regions.

Bishop Mthusi Jairos Letlhage, UEM Vice Moderator from Botswana, concluded: “UEM members in Africa are called to unity in mission, stressing on the importance of being together as a joint church that protects and provides holistically for the community in needs. UEM members are called to empower, equip and provide growth to the community in the midst of current challenges. Without being together, the worldwide church is open to attacks of loneliness, doubt and the devil’s attacks”.

By Rev. Dr John Wesley Kabango, Executive Secretary Africa Department and Member of the UEM Board



In the frame-work of the workshop on disaster management held in Douala-Cameroon, hosted by Evangelical Church of Cameroon (ECC) from 4th -7th 2023, delegates from United Evangelical Mission (UEM) member churches in Africa have been discussing disaster management; its impact on the society and how the church can respond. Their effects in relation to human, social, natural, physical and financial capital were mentioned.

The aim of the workshop was to enhance the participant's skill, knowledge and increase confidence, moreover enable participants to understand the process and whole spectrum of Disaster Management and preparedness activities for effective response and recovery.

An opportunity for all participants was offered to share knowledge and experiences from their own perspective careers and countries during disasters. During the discussions a number of initiatives from different churches were shared by the participants indicating church involvement in managing and responding to disasters as part of accompanying people. Field visits were organized by Evangelical Church in Cameroon ECC/ local committee to Mambanda 1, to learn more about challenges people are going through in-terms of housing and sanitation.

A lot of knowledge was gained as we connected the theory of disaster to the reality in the field. One of regular occupant timidly said: "we are aware of the danger we face in Mambanda...but there is no place

to go".

Some of the initiatives are appreciated and acknowledge the unwavering support from United Evangelical Mission (UEM), members and others actors both local and international.

As a way forward, Participants suggested several recommendations in different areas of interventions on disaster management in preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery:

Together we agree on:

1. The church should have an update and practical contingency plan as a responding processes before, during and after the disaster.
2. We discover that all disaster is either Natural or Man Made.
3. The Church is on the first line to respond in collaboration with the local Government and others stakeholder; so the Church needs to keep an account for own reserve as disaster preparedness.
4. A policy on disaster management which is discuss on the top level and the grass root level,
5. Appoint a contact person who help mobilizing resources to help people affected.
6. Regularly conducting awareness trough media.
7. The church should apply what is preach, translate the word of God in Action so that world may be saved.
8. Etc

By Christine Musongya, Program Officer



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