

Research Article

The Role Small Christian Communities Can Play in the Process of Deeper Evangelization

Rev. Fr. Dr. Kizito Lusambili Muchanga

Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Department of Social Science
Education, Kenya

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Abstract: One of the challenges to evangelization is the weak family church. This primordial, sovereign and domestic church has to be renewed in the area of catechesis and evangelization. There is an urgent need for communality in our families in terms of prayers, bible study, counseling and discipline. Parents have to be concerned that their children receive proper catechesis. Parents have to undertake a thorough follow up exercise and see to it that the pastors assist in the development of the child. Preparation for marriage should have a priority (major pastor duty,) especially today where it is no longer undertaken in the shuttered environment of the village. The empowerment of Christian leaders is a necessity in the facilitation of deeper evangelization programs in Mukumu parish. This research found out that the number of women exceeds that of men. However, our parish has a few women catechists who are untrained and need to be trained adequately so that they can be effective. The role of the women in evangelism should not be ignored as it has been done in the past. Mukumu Parish has the highest number of legionaries in the diocese of Kakamega. The legionaries have the advantage of using the person-to-person approach in their apostolate, if those members are well formed. The legionaries should therefore be catechized and taught new skills to be used in outreaches to homes and hospitals. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) is one of the movements, which focuses on evangelization. For the case of Mukumu, there is need to improve in CCR especially on prayer groups, organization and catechesis. The study concludes that evangelization is a community's responsibility, an integral part of the life of a baptism Christian. The evangelizer acts not on his own, but on behalf of God and the community. It recommends that the *Shimuli* groups should be explored further to understand how they affect the Catholic Church. Additionally, there is need for thorough training of the catechists.

Keywords: Community, challenges, empowerment.

Revitalizing the Domestic Church

One of the challenges to evangelization is the weak domestic church. This primordial, sovereign, and domestic church has to be renewed in the area of the catechesis and evangelization. It is in the family that Christian principles, and virtues are cherished and initial catechesis begins.

Unity in the society, in the parish and in the country begins with the family, the basic cell of the society. The late Joseph cardinal Malula said, "If we want to save Christianity in Africa, we have to aim at Christianizing not only individuals but the whole family..."¹

¹ This was expressed in Cardinal Malula's challenge of the first african and European theologians meeting at Yaounde in 1984. Quoted in Kanyandago, 1991, p.1

For the family in Africa to play the role of evangelization, it has to be evangelized first. *Nemo Dat quod non habet* (you cannot give what you do not have). For Mukumu Parish to keep in tune with the third millennium in ever-deepening the faith, the family must remain at the centre.² Christian families have certain duties that come from their being Christian and African, which make them be of prime importance in nurturing a better society. The family is not only an essential place for re-evangelization but also the place *par excellence* for the formation of Christian laypeople. Every layperson is born in a family; lives as a child, normally in a family, and often builds his own family on the basis of the experience transmitted during childhood and youth.³

Each African Christian family has to become ‘a privileged place for evangelical witness’ a true domestic church.⁴ It has to be a community, which believes and evangelizes,⁵ generously and open to the service of humanity. “It is in the heart of the family that parents are by word and example...the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children.”⁶ It is in the family that the father, the mother, children, and all other members of the family exercise the priesthood of the baptized in a privileged way and recognized cultural pillars and the noble values.

There is an urgent need for communality in our families in terms of prayers, bible study, counseling, and discipline. Parents have to be concerned that their children receive proper catechesis. Parents have to undertake a thorough follow up exercise and see to it that the pastors assist in the development of the child. The family cannot relinquish its position as the nucleus of Christian exercise and in the primary sphere of religious education for children.

Solemnization of marriages

Preparation for marriage is one of the major duties of a pastor, especially today, where it is no longer undertaken in the shuttered environment of the village. Kayandago, while examining how to evangelize, comments that polygamous families need to involve the parents, relatives, and the pastors in preparation. Strengthening the family will help to avoid problems of divorce, separation, mixed marriages, and the like.

Our people need strong catechesis on the differences between matrimony *ndoa* and wedding (*harusi*).⁷ A catechesis that will emphasize the essentials and minimize the secondary aspects, such as clothes, or expensive receptions. A catechized family is the school for covalent social relationships, the grass root for a new society, which is evangelized. Through families, then values of motherhood, fatherhood, filial and brotherly, and sisterly love are properly inculcated.

Empowering the Apostolate of the Laity

The empowerment of Christian leaders is a necessity in the facilitation of deeper evangelization programs in Mukumu parish. “The harvest is plenty, but the workers are few.

² Cf. Barbara Emmanuel, 1999,p.26

³ Cf. *Pontificium Concilium Pro Laicis*

⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, n.11

⁵ Cf., n. 52

⁶ CCC, n.1656, *Lumen Gentium*

⁷ *Ndoa* is a Swahili word that refers to the exchange of consent between two married partners. It is simpler and involves less resources including personnel. *Harusi* on the other and refers to the marital celebration that involves a lot of resources and personnel to organize for two couples.

Ask the lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his vineyard.”⁸ Bishop J. Blomjous wrote that “...every Christian because he is a Christian, must be an apostle. The apostolate is not an exclusive prerogative of the clergy...but is an essential activity, a duty and a right of every member of the church”.⁹

The vocation and mission of the laity can only be defined on the basis of baptism, which is the foundation of every Christian life of Christ, transformed into *Nova Creatura* (new creature). By this gift, he becomes an apostle. One who wants to communicate to others what he has been given. The true Christian, therefore, becomes a missionary, an evangelizer, witness, and is transformed into Gods’ instrument for others.¹⁰

The most potent factor in the spread and penetration of the faith is found in the example of a good Christian life in the world. This could be called the “existential” apostolate of the Christian, the laity’s interaction with the rest of the world. The catechist is direct with those Christians who have fallen-away and non-believers. His exemplary behavior and witnessing is a litmus test for the general life of the parish. The effectiveness of the pastor and the catechist is mirrored in the laity’s witness in the world. Saint Joseph Cafaso once said that if a priest is an angel, then the Christians are saints. The holiness of the priest will be demonstrated in the lives of the laity in the parish. So he added, “show me Christians, and I will tell you about their parish priest”.

This research found out that the number of women exceeds that of men. Therefore, formation, especially for women, is needed. We need women evangelizers to proclaim the Good news to other women, their children, and the entire family. Women prove to be more effective. They are a fundamental factor in the existence of societies and (much) so for the evangelization of Christian communities.

Woman...is the cornerstone of Christianization of the society. For example where women are marginalized economically, socially and culturally they are prevented from placing their energies and gift at the service of the church’s mission.

The animation and formation of the catholic woman is an effective way of promoting greater participation of the laity in the work of evangelization. “Women are formators and animators of the family...even at the SCC level, women play an indispensable role and have been referred to as the backbone of these communities.

Our parish has a few women catechists who, however, need to be trained adequately so that they can be effective. Women are the active participants; their role in the church is essential. “Without discrimination, women should be participants in the life of the church and in the consultation as well as in the decision-making process”¹¹ let us examine the role of women evangelists in the bible, in the Legion of Mary and in the Charismatic Renewal Movement.

a) Women Evangelists in the Bible

The bible has many examples of women who gave their whole life to the services of God. The prototype is the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is the first disciple and the role model of all catechists. In her thirty-three years or so with Jesus, she gave him the human training he

⁸ Code of canon Law, n. 781; Mk 16:15. Christ’s mandate to proclaim the Good News to all people.

⁹ Blomjous, J., 1959. *The function of the Africa Lay man in in the Church*. In *AFER Vol.n.3*

¹⁰ Cf. *Pontificium Consilium Pro Laicis Vaticanis*, 1987, p. 35-36

¹¹ Ibid, p.38

required to be a good Jew and fulfill his religious duties. Under her care with Joseph, his foster father, learned respect and true devotion to God as Judaism was meant to be. Such that he grew strong, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him.¹² Mary did all that a loving mother could do for a child. John Paul says that;

Mary is the role of the Christian women in the spirit and work of spreading across the world the mystery of the incarnate and redeeming world.¹³

We encounter the women in the scripture as the first and faithful witnesses to the Lord, “I have seen the Lord”¹⁴. The woman at Jacob’s well witnessed and called the people to Jesus, “come and see a man who has told me all that I have ever done. Can this be the Christ?”¹⁵ The Samaritan woman drew her folks to Jesus by a sincere act of humility. On reaching Christ, the Samaritans said to the woman, “we no longer believe just because of what you have said, now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the savior of the world.”¹⁶ Indeed, spontaneously, she did a wonderful apostolic work.

In the family, women have the unique opportunity and responsibility to transmit the faith in the early training of their children.¹⁷ They either guide them to Christ as they wander and find whatever they come across. So their role in catechesis is great and cannot be ignored. Women do so much work in the church out of their goodness and generosity. They are the first and the foremost faithful; participants in the parish liturgical life.

b) The Legionaries’ Role in Spreading the Good News

Mukumu Parish has the highest number of legionaries in the diocese of Kakamega.¹⁸ Most of them are women. In his article, “How to Evangelize Your Parish”, Vernon J. Schaefer remarks that the legion of Mary *Praesidium* in the parish can be turned into a band of lay apostles ready to swing into evangelization. Given their living situation they can most easily reach to the unchurched and lure them into joining their Catholic family and they can comfortably invite the alleviated (lapsed) Catholics to come back “home”. Majority of the respondents were of the opinion that if the legionaries can intensify their work of evangelization, charitable works and prayer, the effect of the Shimuli group (which sprung from the legionaries) can be wiped out. If the legionaries move moves around families and homes praying the rosary together.

The legionaries have the advantage of using the person-to-person contact as well. If those members are well formed, [This]; ‘...army of Mary can work steadily to undertake and carry out without hesitation great things for God and for the salvation of souls’.¹⁹ House-to-house visits and evangelization are done well by the legionaries because they are able to take time with those they are visiting. To do this, they therefore need some training to enhance their outreach program and bolster the evangelization process. The presence of a priest once a month in their meeting for advice and encouragement is highly recommended. The legionary

¹² Cf. Judith Mbula Bahemuka, *Op.Cit*, p. 91

¹³ Cf. John Paul II, *Christ to the world*, 1994,p22

¹⁴ John, 20:18

¹⁵ John, 4:29

¹⁶ John4:42

¹⁷ Tusingire Fred, *Op.Cit* p.291

¹⁸ Fridah Indoshi says that there are 25 praesidia doors / groups of legionaries in the parish.

¹⁹ *Homiletic and pastoral Review*, February, 1981, edited by Kenneth Baker, p.58-59

has to be well-grounded in scriptural foundation as well as the rosary. The legionaries should therefore be catechized and taught new skills to be used in outreaches to homes and hospitals.

c) The Catholic Charismatic Renewal

Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) is one of the movements, which focuses on evangelization. The Charismatics are brave, aggressive and zealous Christians who desire to reach the people. Their advantage is that they appreciate the spiritual gifts; healing, exorcism, praying speaking in tongues, discernment and the like.²⁰ They read and acquaint themselves with the scriptures and are conversant with the *outreach programs* especially the one-to-one evangelization. To them, spiritual talks, retreats, seminars, recollections, adorations and praise is part of their life. Some have been trained as pastoral leaders, counsellors and teachers/. They share the word individually and also in groups. It is one of the movements in the church that finds each member prepared for the mission, to see that the divine message of salvation may more and more reach the people at all times and to all places.²¹

In the case of Mukumu Parish, the introduction of CCR faces a number of challenges. It caused divisions and other members claimed to be “saints” and labeled others as “sinners”. It thus lacked direction. At some point, some Catholics referred to it as *Protestantism* or *Pentecostalism* in the Catholic Church. This explains why this movement never took root in this parish and the diocese at large. Had the movement been introduced well, it could bear fruits in evangelization. In Uganda, CCR members have undergone formation at the Katikamu- Emmaus Centre and are evangelizing satisfactorily. This movement does not gain growth and development on its own, it has the directorship of the bishop and priests. It is estimated that CCR members are evangelizing many people. For the case of Mukumu, there needs to be improvement in orientation especially on prayer groups, organization and catechesis. Obedience, humility and prudence should be underscored especially to follow the teachings of the church. It should not be a situation where the laity is clericalised and the clerics are laicized. Programs like life in the Spirit Seminars (LSS), growth in the Spirit Seminars (GSS) and Training of Trainers (TOTs) are to be considered seriously.²²

This will help us to avoid a type of preaching that is threatening, attacking, condemnatory, and sometimes abusive. Preachers that became *holier-than-thou* cause a lot of pain to the people. Our Lord did not threaten, attack, condemn or abuse people. The preachers of the word should not behave like materialistic street preachers. They should instead appreciate the fact that people are faced with many problems including hunger sickness, addiction, and divorce among many others. Such people fear and avoid a condemnation and attack. Desperate and hopeless people need reassurance that God has the ability to change their lives positively. However, if He seemingly offers misery as some of us want to make other believe, people have enough miseries. They don't need anymore. Christ and salvation are not issues to impose upon people through intimidation, trickery, threats, and instances to spell binding.

Conclusion

Evangelization is a community's responsibility, an integral part of the life of a baptised Christian. The evangelizer acts not on his own, but on behalf of God and the community. He carries the Good News of salvation:

²⁰ Cf. 1 Cor 12:4-11

²¹ Code of Canon Law, n.211

²² Rev Augustine Ggooloba, Oral interview on Charismatic Movement.

Every Christian by his or her baptism is an evangelizer, and the work of evangelization is bound up with the Christian vocation itself. Thus, it follows that no age is exempted from this responsibility.²³

Christ's mandate to proclaim the Good News to all people²⁴ was intended to and for all of his followers. Therefore, the task of evangelization does not concern the hierarchy or foreign missionaries alone but is proper to all God's people.²⁵ However, to fulfill this requirement, spiritual and material support in form of finance is indispensable.²⁶ To evangelize is the vocation proper to the church, her most profound indemnity.²⁷ The entire mission of the church is concentrated and manifested in evangelization. The command of Christ was, "go to the entire world and preach the gospel to the whole creation."²⁸ It is through spreading the Good News that the Church is built up into a community of faith. Every disciple has the responsibility, obligation to preach the word in deeds and words. No disciple can withhold making a response and; woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel."²⁹

Witnessing to Christ is very important. *Verbra movent exempla Trahunt*, which means, words moves, but examples pulls. Pope Paul VI stated that;

Modern man listens willingly to witnesses than teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses...it is therefore primary by her conduct and by her life that the church will evangelize the world...by her witness to fidelity to the Lord Jesus...³⁰

St Joseph Cafasso concurs with the Pope, who affirms that all the knowledge of a priest [and other agents of the gospel] will be sterile if his sermons and exhortations and advice are not supported by and sustained by the force of a good example.³¹ Man, woman, or children living as true Christians are witnesses to the response to God's call translated into life. These testimonies, even when they do not appear to be heroic, constitute an indispensable and authentic source of moral catechesis.³² A Christian who truly loves God and his neighbor for God's sake shows his charity in actions. It will there be possible in catechesis to make us use the witness of the Christian by taking examples from family life, cases of mutual help and so forth.³³

The bible and the pastoral ministry that serve it enter the whole life of the church, like a sap for every service of the faith. In proclamation and catechesis, in prayers and spiritual reflections, personal or in common, especially in family life, in the witness of charity, in ecumenical engagement and in inter-religious dialogue. Biblical pastoral ministry ought to permeate the entire pastoral ministry of the church. It's ultimate and unifying scope will be to enable the life of faith and ecclesial hope through the gift of the scriptures that convey us to the extraordinary patrimony of the living testimony of salvation history, through its events and its protagonists in its meaning, and its call to decision.

²³ Shorter, *Op. Cit* p56

²⁴ Mk. 16:15

²⁵ Code of Canon Law, n.781

²⁶ Joseph Sserunjogi, *Op. Cit*,p.142

²⁷ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14

²⁸ Mk, 16:15

²⁹ 1 Cor 9:16

³⁰ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n.41, 1975; AAS68 (1976, p.31

³¹ ³¹ Joseph Cafasso, *Op. Cit* p.25

³² Marcel Van Caster, 1967,p64

³³ *Ibid*, p. 151

Catechesis is the process of teaching and deepening the faith to all the faithful at all levels, to people of different demographic orientation. It is more than just catechesis. It presents the word of God as a living thing. Catechesis, therefore, calls for a holistic approach and not mere compartmentalization into the sacrament of Baptism, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation.

Evangelization empowers the poor and emphasizes their birthright as human beings to share in the good things provided in this word. The bible is not simply a question of words or of doctrine propositions. It is essentially a way of life, a praxis that is there to be believed by God's people.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations on the study findings:-

- i) There is a need for an extensive study of the *Shimuli* group. This would bring to the forefront their reasons for separating from the Catholic Church and hence devise modalities of having them come back to the "sheepfold."
- ii) Our 'Catechists' needs to be trained thoroughly. Ongoing formation is necessary to equip them with appropriate knowledge of the teaching of the church and should learn both the theory and the practice of the principle of pedagogy.³⁴

Conflicts of interest

There is no conflict of interest of any kind.

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³⁴ Code of Canon Law,n.780

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