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ANGLICAN CHURCH OF KENYA MOTHERS' UNION AND FAMILY LIFE: A CASE OF ST THOMAS PARISH IN KILIFI COUNTY

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ANGLICAN CHURCH OF KENYA MOTHERS' UNION AND FAMILY LIFE: A CASE OF ST THOMAS PARISH IN KILIFI COUNTY

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Abstract

Purpose: The study sets out to determine the contribution of the Anglican Church of Kenya Mothers Union (MU) on women, in developing family life at St. Thomas parish in Kilifi County.

Methodology: The researcher employed a descriptive survey. The study targeted 40 members of the Mothers' Union (MU), five members of the clergy and five lay leaders. The selection of these categories of the participants was based on their ability to contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon under study. The study acquired data from both primary and secondary sources. Secondary data involved critical reading of published materials such as; newspapers, journal articles and church magazines. Primary data was collected through questionnaires distributed to 40 members of the Mothers' Union (MU) as well as oral interviews with key informants. These were complimented by focus group discussions (FGDs) that involved participatory observations of the Mothers activities.

Results: The study argued that, the role of women ministry in the Church is limited to service delivery where they engage in worship, and prayers for families and the clergy. In addition, they also participate in the cleaning of the church and occasionally offering food and drinks to guests in the Church. Hospitality expressed by MU is a symbol of worship. This study also established that women involved themselves in most church activities due to their huge membership. However, majority continue to hold minimal responsibilities in the administrative decision-making process of the Church. On the other hand, the Mothers' Union (MU) is also regarded as a social organization due to its support systems to the vulnerable people in the society such as the elderly.

Unique contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The study recommends for mutual harmony and cooperation within the church. The church should acknowledge and favor the proper and necessary participation of women in the cultural life of the society.

Key words: *Mother, Theology, Feminist and Clergy*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives a background of women organization of the Anglican Church, Africa in particular. It also reviews preliminaries literatures on Church and women, women organization and the Anglican Mothers' Union of Kenya. On reviewing of the literatures, it provides the researcher with the means of getting into the frontier of knowledge in contribution of women in church and society at large. The chapter has also discussed the theory applied in the study. The study has used the African Feminist Theory as advocated by Mercy Amba Oduyoye in light with the roles of the MU in improving the living standards of their families. It also discusses the methodology tenets that were applied in the study. The study being a qualitative study, has used various approaches to gather data.

Women organizations in the Church, especially in Africa, are initiatives that form special networks that seek to support women in order to improve family life standards (Were, 1985). Organizations formed by indigenous women in the church play significant roles that stretched from social, economic and spiritual welfare (Were, 1985). In Africa, women in the church account for about 50% of the human population (Were, 1985). It can be argued that development in Africa depends on the effective participation of its women development capacities and their access to appropriate technology, skills, education resources and opportunities, which then permeates to the development of the whole society (Were, 1985). Women initiatives in the church enable them to identify their concerns, and work in teams to achieve their goals. These forums also provide appropriate leadership training opportunities and management capacity building. Women organizations also create more awareness, and help to build confidence in society for positive changes.

The Anglican Church Mothers' Union is a women's organization within the Anglican Church and is part of a World-Wide charitable society. Basically its foundational ethics is on mutual respect and collaboration. Its governance, leadership and programs are driven by members within their own communities. Its activities are church oriented, particularly providing for Mothers' Union families both financially, socially and spiritually. Mothers' Union in the Anglican Church was founded by an English woman, Mary Sumner in 1876 in the Church of England, Parish of Old Alresford near Winchester, where her husband was a rector. She was inspired to start the movement after the birth of her first grandchild, remembering her own difficulties when she was first a mother. Sumner wanted to bring mothers of all social classes together to provide support to one another and to be trained in motherhood something which she saw as a vocation. Mary Sumner addressed women passionately about the power of mothers to change the family, community, and nation at large in a church congress in Portsmouth. Consequently, most women were moved by her inspiration and when they went back to their Parishes they established this organization. From a very humble beginning, the Mothers' Union (M.U) has spread its tentacles globally. The organization supports its members and local communities through prayers, social outreach, and projects geared towards improvement of family life.

In the Anglican Church of Kenya, Mothers' Union was started in 1918 with first members admitted at Kabete Church by missionary ladies. The missionary wives wanted to improve the

family life of the local African women in the church and the whole society at large.¹ The organization aimed at creating an environment of God's love revealed through loving, respect and flourishing relationship through programs, campaigning, community outreach and prayers. This was an expression of Christ love among women in the Church. To the Mothers, the expression of Christ love was the greatest commandment. From its inception in Kenya, the Mothers' Union strived to promote stable family life from parenting group's, health, education, relief services to development programs. Currently, MU is represented in 32 Dioceses of the Anglican Church. It has a national office which co-ordinates all the activities of its member's nation-wide. Each Diocese has a committee which, with the assistance of the employed workers is able to reach any potential group. Members of the mothers' Union include; widows who are above 45 years; single mothers, young mothers and married mothers. In order for one to be admitted, she has to be trained by women fellowship group.

The St. Thomas Parish which is the heart of this study is located in Kilifi town of Kilifi County. St. Thomas Parish has a population of about 700 members. It has two deaneries namely Tezo and Ganze deaneries. Currently the Church has about 70 Mothers' Union members. The objectives of the Mother' Unions (MU) at St. Thomas are quite linear and similar to the parent body in the Church of England. However, the activities vary in context from one region to another as dictated by the local circumstances.

Statement of the Problem.

The existence of Mothers' Union at St. Thomas Parish in Kilifi is as old as the church herself, having been opened in 1960. Despite its long presence and activity programs for improving family life, Kilifi County remains one of the poorest counties in Kenya exposing families within and outside the church to poor living standard. This immensely affects family life in general. Some non-governmental organizations have been providing assistance. The United Nations (U.N), World Food Program (WFP), World Bank, Partnership for Child Development and the Ministry of Education Science and technology (MoEST), for example, have been assisting children with food programs in selected primary schools within the county. This shows the magnitude of poverty level in Kilifi County. The gap observed by this study is that the M.U. at St. Thomas Parish is either acting very slowly or using unfavourable approaches to achieving its goals on family life stability. Therefore this study proposed to determine suitable approaches that may be applied by the St. Thomas M.U to improve family life standards.

Research Objectives

General Objectives.

The aim of this study was to examine the role of the Anglican Church Mothers' Union in improving family life with special reference to St. Thomas Parish

Specific Objectives.

This study specifically attempted:-

- a) To analyze the role of the Mothers' Union in improving family life at St Thomas parish in Kilifi.
- b) To evaluate the development activities of the Mothers' Union geared towards improving family life.
- c) To establish the challenges that the Mothers' Union face in their efforts towards improving family life.

Research Questions.

- a) What role does the Mothers' Union play in improving family life?
- b) What are the activities applied by M.U. and how effective are they in improving family life?
- c) What challenges does Mothers' Union face as they strive towards improving family life?

2.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher employed a descriptive survey in gathering information about the role of the Mothers' Union (MU) within the Anglican Church of Kenya. The study was conducted at St. Thomas parish in Kilifi County, Malindi diocese of the Anglican Church of Kenya. The map below shows the location of St. Thomas Church in Kilifi town. The study targeted 40 members of the Mothers' Union (MU), five members of the clergy and five lay leaders. The selection of these categories of the participants was based on their ability to contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon under study. A semi-structured questionnaire was issued to 40 members of the Mothers' Union prior dialogical workshops and in-depth semi-structured interviews with the leaders of the group. Using purposive sampling technique, five members of the clergy and five lay leaders were identified for interviews. The respondents for the dialogical workshops were randomly selected. Therefore, the primary methods of data collection used in this research included interviews; focus group discussion and participant observation. This was supplemented by secondary materials such as journal articles, books, minutes, magazines and Newspapers. During oral interviews session the researcher recorded the information through a digital recorder. Equally, field notes were also edited for completeness and consistency before further analysis. Data generated from the field were reported in light of the main research objective: 'to examine the role of the Anglican Church Mothers' Union in improving family life using St. Thomas Parish as a case study.' The study data was presented after the analysis inform of themes and pictures/photos illustrating key projects initiated by the Mothers Union. In addition, pictures /photos of the Mothers Union (M.U) projects such as the making detergents, and pictures of the Mothers Union (M.U) members during focus group discussion were used for data presentation.

3.0 RESULTS

This Chapter attempts to document a history of the Mothers' Union in Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK). The chapter also determines the growth and expansion of the St. Thomas

Mothers' Union and its roles that cut across social, economic, spiritual and political spheres of life. In a nut shell, Women's involvements in activities aimed at community development are discussed. The chapter argues that the activities of the Mothers' Union empower them against the backdrop of patriarchy and discrimination within the church. To this end, the chapter critiques the relevance of African feminist theory in light of women emancipation through the Mothers' Union (MU).

3.1 Mothers' Union in the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK).

The Anglican Church in Africa has developed rapidly partly due to efforts of Church women organizations such as the Mothers' Union as indigenous expression of African women's spirituality (Haddad, 2002). Women organizations are known for providing platforms and convectional shelter under which women can share their narratives of oppression and call upon Gods intervention upon their lives and society in general. As noted in Chapter one of the study, the Mothers' Union was started by a daughter in law of Bishop C.R. Sumner of the Winchester Diocese, Mary Sumner back in 1876. Mary Sumner as a young mother felt that women had a responsibility of rising up Christian families. Their aim and purpose was to strengthen and maintain marriage and Christian family life. In Kenya as in many other African countries the MU is a significant avenue through which women take up recognized positions of authority and leadership within the Anglican Church at local and national levels (Higgs).

Nevertheless, the development of the Mothers' Union in Kenya is intertwined in the colonial history of the country where the white race dominated the Africans in all spheres including religion. Galia Sabar observed that the first branch of the Mothers' Union in Kenya was established by Mrs Mary Stewart Lawford, the wife of the British District Commissioner at Fort Hall Diocese in 1918. The membership was restricted to white Anglican women (Sabar, 2012). Structurally, it was patterned on the Mothers' Union of England including its programs. Cordelia Moyse argues that the MU was a typical reflection of other colonial Christian women's organizations of British origin since they confined their scope primarily to social activities of religious nature (Moyse, 2009). By and large, the Mothers Union (MU) remained racially exclusive organization, admitting only white women as members until 1955 (Sabar, 2012).

The establishment of the Mothers Union (MU) during the colonial period was designed on race identity that substantially affected African women spirituality. Since, the 'Christian' identity designated whiteness both from African and European perspectives. Higgs correctly observes that the mutually constitutive nature of whiteness and Christianity for women in colonial Kenya was a major factor underlying the initial exclusion of African women from Christian women's organizations (Higgs, 2016).

It is prudent to note that the Mothers Union in Kenya coexisted side by side with Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) which was under the leadership of Sibella Burns and Gladys Beecher, the wife of the Bishop of Mombasa Diocese. Mrs. Beecher became one of the first women to be appointed as 'National Vice-President' of the YWCA (Harley, 1995).

3.2 The Development Role of Mothers' Union, St. Thomas Church.

The Mothers' Union in Kilifi at St. Thomas church is seen as a women ministry in the church as well as an organization within and outside the church. As a women ministry in the Church, it has been assigned with the responsibility of family welfare. This is evident from its main objectives; to strengthen marriage, to encourage mothers to bring up children to Christian life and to care for the families met by adversity. However, as a women church organization, it involves itself with the social, economic and political conditions that can hinder the developments of the church and society.

3.3 Social Roles and Activities.

The effectiveness of an organization is measured on how it strives to achieve its objectives. The Mothers' Union (MU) contributes to the growth of the Church socially through teaching, seminars, workshops, worship, and hospitality. In order to uphold Christ's teaching on the nature of marriage and to promote its wider understanding, the Mothers Union has engaged on a number of activities aimed at creating and maintaining stable families. These include teaching the young women on the value of marriage, creating awareness on issues that affect women directly such as family planning, HIV and AIDs among others. In a face to face interview with a MU member, Mrs. Ruth Vinya explained that: "As M.U. union members we work as a team, inspiring each other during fellowship. We discuss issues of our children, spouses, and look for alternative ways of how to handle family and social problems. We for example through the Vicar organize for seminars and invite speakers to come and talk to our youth and us as mothers about family planning, HIV and AIDS in order to become responsible people in the church, society and to our own families. Sometimes the M.U. through our Vicar is invited to conferences outside the diocese or parish of how to be good stewards or managers of our own families.

3.4 Workshops and seminars.

The MU at St. Thomas church do hold teachings sections where the elderly MU members have a teaching section with the teenagers and the young mothers/women on various issues in life such as the values of marriage. The teens are guided and counselled on moral values, good grooming, being responsible, participating in church activities, choosing good friends among others. This compliments what Hale-Benson argues in his book that good parents know who their children's friends are. They invite them over to get to know them better. Many parents program the peer group for their children and may sometimes even select the people who they want their children to interact with (Hale-Benson, 1985). The mothers' Union therefore, takes this responsibility of guiding the teens from their church and sometimes invites teens from other denominations. The MU aims at creating an environment of God's love revealed through loving, respect and flourishing relationship through programs, campaigning community outreach and prayers. The organization works through volunteer members to create a lasting change for families. In a FGD held on 21st, Nov 2016 at the church premise, Linnet an elderly MU member puts that "the young mothers need to be taught and reminded on the values of marriage, so that they can be good managers of their own homes as wives and mothers. Her sentiment compliments what Regina Scheylles argued in her article 'Church Women group and Empowerment of Women' that, women need to be empowered with skills, knowledge and confidence to determine the

development path they may wish to follow (Scheyvens, 2003). This knowledge empowered to the young women/mothers assists them to face marriage challenges positively. Rita, a young mother in the discussion affirmed that the teaching have assisted her to treat her husband who seemed to be difficult to be understood according to the wife. She affirmed that she attempted to separate with her husband, but the fact that she is a devoted Christian and according to the Bible teaching, that A man shall leave his mother and father and hold first to his wife and they shall become one flesh. She has not separated.

3.5 Hospitality

Hospitality refers to the relationship between a guest and a host, where in the host receives the guest with goodwill including the reception and entertainment of guest, visitors or strangers. The Mothers Union has been an expression of African hospitality in the Church and society. According to Desmond Tutu, African hospitality is an expression of African Christianity. He observes that this ‘hospitality speaks about humaneness, gentleness, and hospitality, putting yourself on behalf of others, being vulnerable. This expression is also reminiscent of Christ’s words that, “He who saves his life loses it and whosoever loses it finds it. To Gathogo, African hospitality expresses the African sense of communality. But Gathogo goes further to argue that the word ‘hospitable’ to Africans is associated with grace, to be associated with divine name; for God is also described as ‘gracious’ among the Africans. To be hospitable, therefore, is to participate in God’s gracious acts of doing well to others.

Information from members of the M.U. is that they normally show this in the church first. “it is our responsibility as M.U. in the church to participate in the furnishing of the pastors house, welcome visitors in the church by preparing meals or snacks in case visitor such as our bishop. The Mothers’ Union while appropriating indigenous knowledge’s and the concept of hospitality as expression of their own Christianity play an active role in helping people whose life has been met with adversity. These have been evident on their response to the sick, orphans, widows and other vulnerable people in the society. “We the M.U. have been visiting the sick either at the hospital or at home. On 14th June 2016, for example, we visited Mama Joyce who was unwell and admitted in Kilifi District Hospital, we encouraged and prayed for her.

According to this research, the mother’s social activities parallels well with Mbiti’s summary of the philosophy underlying the African way of life, thus: “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am. It is on this basis that the women initiated healing ministry where they pray for the sick and the bereaved family members as they express their unity in times of need ‘tuko na wewe (Swahili for “you are not alone”). In addition, they respond to those who have had tragedies in the society such as accidents. The late Revered Albert Fondo described women as more merciful and concerned to the wellbeing of members of the society. It is from such basis that they provide support and information for mothers on matters relating to public health and the care of their children.

This research established from the Vicar and focus group discussions that the Mothers’ Union formed a social initiative of caring for the elderly in the community. Their argument towards this initiative was that, some elderly people have been abandoned by their families and are vulnerable to early death suppose they do not receive care. What they said in the focus groups is that; they have not established homes or day care centers, but are keen in supplying food, clothing and

water to the aged members of the community. The M.U. according to an interview with Grace Kabibi also works with widows and single parents in their different needs. Kabibi noted that; “M.U. organizes for fellowships for mothers including those who are bereaved and makes sure they get the necessary assistance required” This is all about improving family life standards by overcoming problems that face mothers in their families. In addition, the M.U. offers counseling services to families and individuals that have been affected by drugs and encouraging them to live a Christian life.

The role played by M.U. in Kilifi is crucial to the church and society due to the help offered, also to broken families who later reunite. This is supported by Galia Sabar who has the view that such ‘guidance’ and support on women, is part of the Anglican Church’s wider efforts to help African women ‘improve their daily lives’ (Sabar, 2012).

Two members; Lizzy and Lilian explained that, Mothers’ Union takes marriage seriously and works to make sure that families are in harmony. In order to strengthen marriages, the Mothers’ Union (MU) through the guidance of the priest keeps on talking to fellow women who have marriage conflicts. This is supported by MacArthur’s Commentary on 1 Timothy 2:9-15, he observed that women’s role in the church is to be a learner especially in the public worship. He says, “It may seem obvious to us as women should be taught God’s Word, since women are spiritually equal to Christ and the commands of the New Testament are to all (MacArthur, 1995). Those who have not solemnized their marriages are also encouraged to do so in the church. The Vicar, and in the focus group discussions, show that every year, they organize for mass wedding services and provide requirements such as entertainment and paying for the marriage certificate. Occasionally, they organize for educative drama festivals that mostly portray how a good Christian woman and a mother should conduct herself in society, in the church activities in order to be a role model. These social activities have contributed to qualitative and numerical growth of the church.

3.6 Talent week.

Another important social activity of the Mothers Union (MU) is the talent week held in the month of August annually. During the week, members of the Mothers Union (MU) visit the pastor’s house on Monday to do cleaning and have a fellowship together. They too carry food stuffs to the pastor. On Tuesday, they visit the sick in the hospital. Ruth Njoroge, the chair lady of the Mothers Union (MU) in an interview with the researcher explained that they usually conduct hospital visits such as, Kilifi General Hospital, Pwani Medical Clinic, and pray for the sick. Upon prayers, some of them get well. They also have a program of visiting each other as M.U. members each Wednesday of the week for fellowship and prayers. (also known as the Home Bible Church HBC, or Home Cells) On Thursday all members of MU meet at the church as from 5.00pm for the same purpose of fellowship. The Mothers conduct communal cleaning of the church on Friday. However, Saturday is dedicated to the family while Sunday they conduct the three services of the day. The women activities in the church are in line with what Mary Hurt argued in her study that even if ordination of women were denied in the church, there was full women participation in the church ministry (Hunt, 2009). The table 2.1 below gives a summary of the social activities of the Mothers Union during the talent week

Table 1: Social Activities of the Mothers Union on the Talent Week.

Days	Activity
1 Monday	Service to the clergy & fellowship
2 Tuesday	Hospital healing fellowship
3 Wednesday	Home fellowship
4 Thursday	Church fellowship
5 Friday	Communal cleaning of the church
6 Saturday	Family fun day
7 Sunday	Special service led by members of the Mothers' Union (MU)

3.7 Economic Roles and Activities.

Data from the questionnaires that were supplied for inquiry indicate that, the Mothers Union considers the aspect of strong economy as key; in that it builds up families and society to live comfortable life. Poor economy in any country affects the health and reduces dignity of families. Abject poverty hinders women from enjoying the Christian values and teachings and makes members to be dependent. This dependency eventually results to gender biasness where inequalities start to emerge. The most vulnerable group affected by gender inequality and access to assets are women in rural communities and informal urban settlements. According to Gitari poverty within Africa affects women and children disproportionately. The St. Thomas M.U. according to feedback has been determined to address the problem of gender inequalities and poverty through initiating a number of projects that aim at poverty alleviation. The involvement of the Mothers Union in such activities is not an isolated case in Kenya.

Historically African women in colonial period belonged at sometimes during their lives to one or more of small, local, and informal women's groups. Such groups functioned through the pooling of their members' labor and resources, allowing women to work together to pursue larger scale projects such as building houses and large scale farming (Francis, 1995). The Mothers Union (MU) projects aimed at poverty alleviation stretch from table banking, coconut farming, detergent making, and poultry keeping mainly broilers as captured in figure 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 respectively.



Figure 1: The Mothers' Union Detergent making Project



Figure 2: The Mothers' Union Poultry project

The concept of table banking is a contemporary concept but egalitarian in approach. Within African communities people were encouraged to work together by pulling their resources for a common purpose. Women meet on weekly basis to give their savings/contributions in a round table. By the end of the year they are expected to divide the weekly collections to members. The mothers are also allowed to get soft loans against their shares/weekly total contributions. According to the treasurer of the MU, Beatrice Kasichana, the soft loans are given in accordance to the member contributions.

If a member contributes much, qualifies to get a big loan and vice versa. The loans are paid within duration of six month with minimal interest of 5%. Hellen Mnyazi in an interview with the researcher observes that she educated her daughter to secondary level through loans she got from the Mothers Union (MU). Similar sentiments were shared by Felister Kariuki and Grace Mbaru who correctly argued that the Mothers Union (MU) has been of great help to them since the organization managed to pay her hospital bills when she fell sick and went for treatment.



Figure 3: The Mothers' Union poultry project

The table banking concept is complimented by merry-go round where women make some contributions of amount varying from Kenya shillings 300 to 500 and the total collection is handed over to one woman for development purposes. The merry-go round collections are conducted every Sunday after the Swahili service. Both table banking and merry go-round concepts are based on indigenous philosophies of *ubuntu* where unity of purpose overrides individual's interest and that communal development is synonymous to individual development .Many African proverbs express this communalistic approach to life. To use Agiriama (read African) proverb; *mwanemwane yagonya nyoka* which says: "disunity only signifies failure or the Swahili proverb; *kidole kimoja hakivunji chawa* (one finger cannot kill lice)." It means, no one's own, as an individual, one cannot do something substantial. One needs others for advice, teaching, rebuke, correcting and training above other things (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16).The African cultural resources expresses the value of interdependence where by wealth comes by working together (Gathogo, 2001). It means that for a society to prosper, co-operation and mutual support are keys to success. This co-operation is to start from a house/family, clan, and tribe to the whole

nation. It cuts across all spheres of life. This agrees with Christ's caution that a house divided cannot stand (Matthew 12:25). The Mothers' Union (MU) demonstrated that African cultural resources are rich in the development of Christianity in post-colonial era.

Other projects that the Mothers Union (MU) has initiated include detergent making, poultry keeping; kitchen project (*jiko la mama*) and upcoming projects involve dairy farming and guest house. The Mothers Union, kitchen project also known in Kiswahili as '*jiko la mama*' has been seen as an expression of hospitality of the church to visitors and members of the congregation. The researcher observed that, the Mothers are expected to feed the guests of the church as well as members of the congregation on special occasions, for instance if a bishop of the Diocese visits the church or if it is a family Sunday or during the talent week on Aug. The concept of sharing food together as members of the church is part and parcel of fellowship. Mbiti observes correctly that if there is no fellowship, there is no sharing of food during one's life (Mbiti, 2002). The Mothers Union through its self-sustaining projects; training and empowerment have built a strong and credible constituency for development that has improved family lives in Kilifi. Thus the Mothers' Union is a clear example of the ministry of women in the church and a proof to the argument that women are pillars of the church (Mwangi, 2011).

3.8 Spiritual Roles and Activities.

As established earlier, women's commitment in the Church has generated forms of ministries that also influence spiritual life to African communities. Nevertheless, women's dominating the church in terms of populace has not merited them to dominate leadership; instead men have often been taking leading positions. John MacArthur in his book, New Testament commentary 1Timothy, defends what he considered to be God's plan for women in the church (MacArthur, 1995). He laments that "the traditional doctrines are being swept away by the floods ties of evangelical Feminism. Churches, schools and seminaries are rapidly abandoning truth they have held since their inception" (MacArthur, 1995). He claims that Biblical passages on women's roles were being actually interpreted and ignored because of the alleged ant-female bias of the Biblical authors or dismissed as the additions of later redactors. He wrote that this is Satan's plan to entice women away from their God created role in the family, church and society. The aim of this study is not to analyze the factors behind the preponderance of women over men in the Church or the great disparity evident in leadership rather it examines their religious contribution towards the growth and development of the church.

Feminist scholarship shows that African women in the church, for generations, have not been accepted for the ordained ministry and high level church positions. The trend is drastically changing and women are taking leadership while others are joining the ordained ministry and taking administrative positions in churches, the Anglican Church of Kenya for example. Ordination and other position of leadership, according to this study is a ministry in terms of roles played. Since, it would be self-defeating to narrow down the work of women in the church to one type of service. According to Lavinia Byrne in 'Women at the altar' argued that women role in the proclamation of the good news is characterized by; catechizing to the catechumens and Christians, visiting families, the poor, the sick and outcasts, involvement in retreat and spirituality sessions, and teaching religion, to the level of theology in every capacity (Byrne, 1995).

To nature spirituality of individuals and the Church in general, St. Thomas, Mothers Union (MU) have in their capacity been engaged in annual conventions, home and church fellowships, (Sundays). During session with focus groups, it was established that; the home fellowships are held every Thursday of the week rotating from one member to another.

3.9 Training.

The Anglican Church MU at St. Thomas church is allowed to conduct the service in the church only after attending training for a certain period of time. David Roebuck in his study *Theology Today* argued that within the broader Pentecostal denominations women's roles were very diverse in the church of God, and that testimony would be heard from women of the call of God to preach the Gospel (Roebuck, 2012). He talks of a denominational founder R.G Spurkling who likely issued ministerial credentials to women. Roebuck argued on the important positions occupied by women in the time of Christ and his apostle's (Roebuck, 2012). According to him church women were recognized as deaconesses and licenses were supplied to women who engaged in the ministry of the word of God. Women who hold those certificates served in the church of God in many capacities. Such as church helpers, deaconesses, evangelists, assistant pastors, exhorters, music ministers educational ministers, teachers, editors and missionaries (Roebuck, 2012). In an interview with vicar at the church premise, the researcher observed that MU eligible members were allowed to attend a series of training twice in a month on Saturdays. This was observed to be on the first and last Saturday of every month in the afternoons. The women were trained on the procedural conduct of the services. Eligible members are those whose families are members of the Anglican Church. This according to the vicar is for efficiency of the family and the church at large.

The study also established that the training of the MU was only done to the married members/mothers. The single mothers/women were not trained. This according to the Vicar of the church is, the single women or mothers may not be experiencing or facing the challenges that the married mothers are facing in their families or marriages. The married women attend the training for a period of six months consecutively after that period they qualify to conduct a service. In an oral interview with Grace Karisa, she affirmed that, Lynet Shaha and her qualified and was eligible in conducting the services in either Revival or Swahili service which commence from 7.00am to 9.00 am and 11.30am to 1.30pm respectively. The women only conduct the service.

3.10 Home Based Fellowships (Home Cells).

Home based fellowships are also known as home cells or home units. These are designed to create a sense of belonging, warmth and support to church members living in a particular area. It is in these fellowships that the welfare of the congregation members of the MU is addressed. The members within the home cell are close to each other's welfare at all times. In the FGD, held on 3rd Aug 2016 at Mama Liner's home, where the members had met for home fellowship, the members affirmed that at these fellowships or home cells they share the word of God, pray together and share their challenges too. The researcher observed that, in these home fellowships the MU sometimes do share a cup of tea or sometimes a meal. The members air out their challenges as women and mother especially those that affect the MU and the church. The leaders

takes the complains from their members to the church and the church respond to those complains accordingly. For instance Lilian Baya argued that the church had borrowed some cash from the MU kit of which by then the church had not return the money. The church borrowed the money during the visit by the bishop at the church. Their leader in that home cell, Christine Kambi took the matter to the church and the church responded positively.

During the home fellowships, the members do carry foodstuffs to the member whose home would be used for fellowships. The venue for the fellowship rotates .The home-based fellowships are being held every Thursdays from 5.00pm to 6.00pm. The MU at St. Thomas church has five home based fellowships. The researcher managed to attend two of these home cells.



Figure 4: A picture showing MU at home based fellowship in Misufini Kilifi town at Mama Christine's home

In a FGD, members revealed that home-based fellowship were a good source of support to the MU. Members of these fellowships are usually the first to offer any support to their members even before the church intervene in case a member is in great need. For instance Mama Grace who belongs to prison home cell, when she lost her husband, the MU members in her home cells, were the first to assist and mourn with her “kuomboleza” even before the church gave its condolence to mama Grace.

4.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMEDATIONS.

SUMMARY

Role and Activities of the Mothers' Union (MU) in improving Family Life

The study observed that the Mothers Union (MU) has been an expression of African hospitality in the Church and society. This hospitality as expressed by the Mothers Union (MU) speaks about humaneness, gentleness, and hospitality what Desmond Tutu refers as putting yourself on behalf of others, being vulnerable. This corresponds to their mandate of assisting those families met with adversity. In addition, they engage in charity work and social activities to promote conditions in society favorable to stable family life and protection of vulnerable children as Mrs. Vinya puts "As M.U. union members we work as a team, inspiring each other during fellowship. We discuss issues of our children, spouses, and look for alternative ways of how to handle family and social problems

The study also established that the Mothers Union (MU) has also taken initiative to care for the elderly in the community. In addition to helping the elderly; the Mothers are also working hand in hand with widows and single parents in their different needs. For instance it was noted that they organize for fellowships for mothers including those who are bereaved and assisting one another to overcome problems that face mothers in their families. According to Oduyoye, there were provisions within the African tradition not only for the protection of women, but also for their involvement, participation and contribution to the wellbeing of the larger community The study argues that all these are undertaken in the wider framework of helping those met with adversity as an expression of African Christianity.

In line to its mandate of upholding Christ teachings on the nature of marriage; and to promote its wider understanding, the study established that the Mothers Union (MU) has initiated a number of activities within and outside the church aimed at creating and maintaining stable families. In particular the study observed that they teach the young women on the value of marriage, creating awareness on issues that affect women directly such as family planning, infidelity; and HIV and AIDs among others. In addition to that, the Mothers Union also organizes seminars and workshops where guest speakers share their experiences with women on various topics of interest to the women.

Development Activities of the Mothers' Union towards improving Family Life.

The study analyzed some of the development activities of the Mothers Union (MU) and established that most of the activities aimed at building stable families by improving their spiritual and religious life, eliminating economic challenges that creates poverty and engaging in political activities that improves the well-being of the society. The study established that the socio-economic activities of the Mothers Union (MU) are a pointer to the expansion of recognized women's domains of interest and activity in the society. In addition; the women have used the Mothers Union (MU) to negotiate for power and agency in the backdrop of patriarchal constraints towards improving their family life.

The study also observed that the economic activities that the Mothers Union (MU) members engaged in stretched from detergent making, poultry keeping; and kitchen project (*jiko la mama*). The study found the kitchen project also known in Swahili as '*jiko la mama*' as an expression of African hospitality by the church to visitors and members of the congregation. The concept of sharing food together as members of the church is part and parcel of their fellowship. This confirms Mbiti's observation that if there is no fellowship, there is no sharing of food during one's life. The study also established that the adoption of table banking and merry go-round concepts by the Mothers Union (MU) revolutionized their economic power by uplifting them against poverty, oppression, and diseases such as HIV and AIDS. The study observed that table banking and merry go-round concepts are based on indigenous philosophies of *ubuntu* where unity of purpose overrides individual's interest and that communal development is synonymous to individual development. It is from such grounds that the Mothers Union (MU) members have managed to grow and developed into a vibrant women organization.

The study established that the political activities of the Mothers' Union (MU) are limited to elimination of economic conditionality that impoverished them. They are not engaged in rigorous political activities although sometimes they invite political leaders to make contributions in their forums. This corroborates the arguments of Cordelia Moyses that the Mothers' Union (MU) is a typical reflection of other colonial Christian women's organizations of British origin since they confined their scope primarily to social activities of religious nature. The St. Thomas, Mothers' Union (MU) is a reflection of this heritage where religious activities and family issues are of primary concern to the economic and political spheres.

Challenges facing the Mothers' Union in their efforts to improve Family Life

This study also sought to determine some of the challenges hindering women participation in the Church, and even achieving its objectives. The study established that the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) is still stuck on the colonial legacies of exclusion and marginalization of one gender over the other. This is well illustrated by the St. Thomas Church where men dominated all key departments of the church while the Mothers' Union (MU) was merely seen as a service ministry to the Church. For instance the Mothers' Union (MU) members complained that their activities were viewed as secondary to those of KAMA; therefore, they received little support from the church leadership. The study further argues that the legacy of these historical processes has produced a thread of commonality which appears to permeate church-women's experiences in mainstream churches such as ACK to that of gender subordination and exclusion. This reinforces the arguments of Isabella Phiris that for African women, gender issues are overlaid by the legacies of racist imperialism, patriarchy and colonialism. The St. Thomas Church, Mothers' Union (MU) has not been exempted from patriarchal challenges that disempowered them socially, economically and politically.

CONCLUSIONS

This was an exploratory study on the contribution of the Mothers Union (MU) towards improving family life in Kilifi. The study established that the Mothers Union (MU) as a Christian women organization (CWO) used resources from their faith, and culture to bring change and

transformation in the Church and society. The Mothers Union (MU) through empowerment and education of their members, they have managed to negotiate positions of leadership in the Church and society. The study established that the women using their social networks and new identity as Mothers as well as leaders they have managed to challenge hegemonic forces within African culture and in the wider society to work towards justice, peace and reconciliation, political and economic emancipation. This has contributed immensely to the general development of their families and the Church.

The study also established that the role performance by the Mothers Union (MU) members is influenced to some extent by their levels of income, education, autonomy and family size. This partly had an impact on their social relations within the group which created some internal tensions and leadership wrangles. This was worsened by inadequate finances and lack of expertise which hindered the implementation of some projects such as the construction of guest house. The study also observed that too much emphasis on religious instruction since the Mothers' Union (MU) members are expected to obey the moral and social teachings of the Church overshadowed some of their socio-economic initiatives.

Nevertheless, the study argued that the Mothers Union (MU) through its self-sustaining projects; training and empowerment built a strong and credible constituency for development that has improved family lives in Kilifi. Thus the Mothers' Union is a clear example of the ministry of women in the church and a proof to the argument that women are pillars of the church. Since, they have provided the much needed space of integration and construction of solidarities' among women at the grass root level. This study observed that Mothers Union (MU) has contributed to this atmosphere of solidarity by offering women in male-dominated church communities a space to come together and assert their own priorities. The power exerted by the Mothers Union has motivated most representatives from political circles to attend special Mothers Union (MU) conventions to speak to the members and answer their questions on development issues.

The study employed African feminist theology (AFT) as a holistic paradigm for the emancipation of African women (social, economic and spiritual development). However, it established that the church rigid male dominated structure is still an impediment to women progress. It was observed that since the establishment of St. Thomas Church in 1959, not a single woman has been ordained into priesthood as compared to other churches in Kirinyaga diocese where many women have been ordained as priests. This has partly hindered the development and growth of the Mothers Union (MU) as a women ministry in the church. Since, it cannot realize its full potentiality.⁹

Finally, the study established that the Mothers Union (MU), in its endeavors to promote family life have empowered women in many fundamental ways through involvement in church activities; and that there has been a remarkable impact in the church due to women's participation. In addition, it could be deduced that the Mothers Union (MU) represents liberated interpersonal relations, a union which shares its goods and values of human dignity, equality, sincerity, and social justice with others in the Church.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study noted that women received less support from the male clergy in the Church. Therefore, this study argues that since mother's experiences and concerns are different from men's, the Church need to offer them technical support where necessary rather than sabotaging their initiatives. On the other hand members of the Mothers' Union (MU) felt that projects of the men association (KAMA) were given more priority than their own projects. The study recommends for mutual harmony and cooperation within the church. The church should acknowledge and favor the proper and necessary participation of women in the cultural life of the society.

The study also noted that the Mothers Union (MU) was seen as a complimentary social group in the Church contrary to its objectives. Therefore, this study recommends that the Mothers Union (MU) should not only view their union as complementary to men's ministry rather as a key women ministry in the Church.

Suggested Areas for further Study.

In view of the research findings, conclusion and recommendations, the following areas should be considered for further research;- This study considers the Mothers' Union (MU) as a women ministry in the Church and as social organization in the society. Thus its roles and activities were analyzed from the two perspectives. However further research should be conducted on the political activities of the Mothers' Union (MU) as a women organization within the Anglican Church with dense networks across the country. Equally, the biographical analysis of notable founder members of the Mothers' Union (MU) in Kenya also deserves serious study since most biographical scholarship in the church concentrate on male clergy with ecclesiastical authority mainly Bishops and Archbishops.

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