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The Role of the Church Leadership in the Effective Implementation of the Peace Building Strategies in Londiani, Kenya

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Abstract:
The study sought to establish the role of the church leaders in the effective application of the peace building strategies in enhancing lasting ethnic harmony in Londiani Sub County of Kericho County, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target population for this study was 27,336 subjects, from five churches: Roman Catholic Church, Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Deliverance Church, Worldwide Gospel Church, and Full Gospel Church in Londiani area. Purposive random sampling was employed to select Church leaders while, stratified simple random sampling was employed to select Church members. The study employed questionnaires for quantitative data collection. Data was analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS, version 23) for windows. Qualitative data obtained from the interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed thematically and presented in narrative form and where possible tabular form. A pilot study was done on 6 respondents that comprised 2 Church leaders, and 4 Church members who were not from the sampled group. Test re-tests method using Cronbach formula was used to evaluate the reliability of the research instruments. The research findings revealed that in principle there are peace building strategies in every church. The challenge was on the inability by church leaders to implement. The study recommends that church leaders should take their evangelization role seriously, instill in the community good values that may be used in promoting peaceful ethnic coexistence, act as bridging gap and reconciliation agent both vertically and horizontally.

Keywords: Leadership peace, strategies

1. Introduction

The role of the church in peacemaking is strengthened by the fact that the social and political crisis in the society questions radically the message of the gospel. The church's initiatives for reconciliation were anchored on the concept that peace is the tranquility that flows from right order. When we put right order into the structures of our society, the tranquility that results is peace. Many people, however, perceive peace as the absence of war or violence (Steele 2011).

The Church's charisma and likewise her unique nature vis-à-vis reconciliation, at whatever level it needs to be achieved, lies in the fact that she always goes back to that reconciliation at the source. For by reason of her essential mission, the Church feels an obligation to go to the roots of the conflict, in order to bring healing and to re-establish, so to speak, an equally original reconciliation which will be the effective principle of all true reconciliation. Therefore, the Church has the mission of proclaiming this reconciliation (Steele 2011).

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Whenever ethnic conflict occurs in any part of Kenya it attracts massive attention from different personnel's and organizations, in this case the church. This phenomenon compels peace builders to intervene in order to mitigate its frequent occurrence. Most players in the peace sector, the church in particular, have formulated strategies to enable them deal with such conflicts. These church based strategies have often been used by Christians to promote harmonious co-existence among the different ethnic groups but in vain. Conflicts erupts repeatedly among Christians, even some in the same church. They kill, maim, rape, steal and displace and even destroy property in the name of their ethnic affiliations. Londiani area including the church therein has not known lasting peace because ethnic conflicts keep on recurring leaving behind devastating effects, which includes a trail of destruction. The study sought to establish the role of the church leaders in the effective application of the peace building strategies in enhancing lasting ethnic harmony in Londiani Sub County of Kericho County, Kenya.

2. Literature Review

An increasing number of scholars dealing with conflicts and practitioners are writing about indigenous methods of peace building which fall under symbolic approaches to conflict, lending legitimacy to its inclusion in conflict theory and giving the field new language to use in its analysis of conflict (Lederech, 2007). Symbolic approaches to conflict grow out of an understanding that humans need to symbolically understand who they are and how they relate to their environment; worldviews are shaped by personal experiences, the cultural groups to which an individual belongs (Schirch, 2001). When initiating efforts to restore or build peace, it is equally important to go to the roots.

Magesa (2003) equates peace with conflict transformation and resolution. He however, maintains that peace is achieved only when the root causes of the differences of conflicting relationships are explored and resolved. He defines reconciliation as 'the act by which people who have been apart and split off from one another begin to stroll or match together again' (Ibid). In recent years, faith-based organizations, have engaged in peacemaking activities. These faith-based peace-building initiatives have been credited with contributing positively to peace-building in four main ways. Specifically, they have been identified as providing: (1) 'emotional and spiritual support to war-affected communities' (2) effective mobilization for 'their communities and others for peace'; (3) mediation 'between conflicting parties'; and 4) a conduit in pursuit of 'reconciliation, dialogue, and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.

In the context of the change now taking place on the continent, the church has a role to play in reducing or eliminating all together the root causes of simmering or open conflicts and effecting true peace. One way of effecting true peace is by becoming agents of peace building. It is evident to note the characteristics and skills of a successful mediator in conflict situations, in our case, the church. Indeed, the church has impartiality regarding issues of dispute; it commands respect of and is acceptable to all protagonists; it has the knowledge and skill to deal out with challenging issues of conflict. These characteristics informed this study in its pursuit of structuring the complementary approach

2.1. Theoretical Framework

This study was based on a combination of several models of peace building and theories advanced in the area of religion and peace building. The church teaches that it is not possible to be reconciled with God before people are reconciled with one another. This is because reconciliation must be among people before going to God (Mathew 5:23: -25; 18:23-35; 1 John 4:20). In this way the church acts as a bridging gap and reconciliation agent between God and human beings, and human being with the fellow human beings. By and large, the church uses theological/penitence approach to reconciliation.

The theological/penitence approach is perpetrator oriented in general and guilt-oriented in particular. Four dimensions of guilt have been indicated: towards other, towards the victim, towards self and towards God. The approach then proceeds in a well-described chain: submission-confession-penitence-absolution (Galtung, 2001). However, this approach only works for the Christian believers. Thus it is not fully applicable and effective in situation of ethnic conflicts which cut across other faiths. Nevertheless, this study finds submission and confession useful in its complementary approach.

Cognizant of the varied models and approaches of peace building, the current research is guided by a complementary approach. This approach entails a mutual combination of theological/penitence approach used by the church because it involves all the methods of peace building and reconciliation including African indigenous methods, which had been sidelined or totally rejected by the church and other contemporary approaches. Ethnic conflict involves disorientation of the normal human living pattern. To bring normalcy in Londiani, all aspects of human being must be targeted. A complementary approach that involves different methods which target diverse aspects can achieve a long lasting solution in conflict areas of Londiani. That is, the socio-religio-cultural aspects of human being are treated and given the necessary attention that had been excluded from the previous attempts to bring peace.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study utilized descriptive survey research design. This research design was considered appropriate for this study because it enabled the researcher to comprehensively observe, record, describe and analyze the programs employed by the church to promote peace and interethnic, harmonious co-existence for the people of Londiani. Though the researcher did not envisage actual control of independent variables, but systematic procedures were employed to collect and analyze data.

3.2 Target Population

The target population comprised of 27,336 participants from the Roman Catholic Church, Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Deliverance Church, World Wide Gospel Church and Full Gospel Church within Londianiarea.

3.3. Sample Size and Techniques

In the selection of participants, both purposeful and random sampling techniques were used. In this study a sample size of 27,336 participants from five leading denominations was used. Roman Catholic Church (RCC), Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), Deliverance Church (DC), World Wide Gospel Church (WWGC) and Full Gospel Churches of Kenya (FGCK) that are currently running programs that target peace building were purposively selected. The five Churches were the key informants for this study.

3.4. Data Collection Instruments

3.4.1. Questionnaire

An open and closed ended questionnaire was distributed to two hundred and twenty (220) participants selected from the eleven (11) churches sampled by the researcher. The researcher personally administered the questionnaires and collected them the same day. Since the questionnaires were distributed after Sunday service, enough time was allowed for each participant to answer all the questions to their satisfaction. The questionnaires were advantageous because they covered a larger population within a short time at a minimal cost on the part of the researcher and intensified independence and accuracy of responses from the respondents. The questions began with those that were interesting, non-threatening, not vague, logical and directly relevant. Each question was limited to a single idea, varied, closed and open-ended (Orodho and Kombo, 2000).

3.4.2. Interview Schedules

According to Cohen and Manion (1980) Interviews are important tools in research for they enable the researcher to obtain in depth information for inferential analysis. Face to face interview were scheduled for Forty-four (44) participants from the eleven (11) churches as follows: 11 clergy and 33 church leaders (the chairpersons of the church, the secretary and treasurer) from each sampled church as shown in table 2 above. Interviews were scheduled according to the convenience of the participants. A lot of valuable information was received.

3.4.3. Focused Group Interviews

Focus groups are in-depth, qualitative interviews with a small number of carefully selected people, to help the researcher understand a phenomenon. The researcher, with the help of church leaders, selected and assembled 10 participants from each of the eleven churches separately. Using an open-ended questionnaire, the research asked the participants questions about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes toward interethnic conflicts, peace building strategies and why there was no harmonious coexistence in the area sometimes. The researcher ensured that the setting was natural, conducive and friendly and this afforded an open interactive session where participants talk freely with each other. There was only one session per group where discussions lasted for at least two (2) hours, depending on each group. The researcher gathered a wide range of information on the topic within a relatively short time span.

3.5. Data Analysis Techniques and Procedures

This study employed descriptive statistics to analyze the data obtained. The qualitative data collected using interview and focus group guides was cleaned and organized into themes and reported thematically in line with the objectives of the study. Quantitate data was collected through the questionnaire. It was coded data and then put in a personal laptop and checked continuously during the course of the study.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Data Is Presented, Analyzed and Research Findings Summarized

	F.	Percent
Yes	290	77.9
No	84	22.1
Total	374	100

Table 1 : Church Based Program on Believers Coexisting in Peace and Harmony

According to table 1, 77.9% of the participants indicated that believers coexist in peace and harmony in comparison to nonbelievers. Therefore, church leaders, as shepherds who tend congregations comprising diverse political, socio-economic, cultural and ethno-linguistic backgrounds need to be impartial on various standpoints as heads of churches. This limits divisions within congregations, hence harmony and unity (Kobia, 2005).

The study further sought information on whether the program helps the community to live as ambassadors of peace and ethnic harmony among the communities. The results are as shown on table 2

	NO.	Percent
Strongly Agree	118	31.1
Agree	180	48.9
Disagree	50	13.2
Strongly disagree	26	6.8
Total	374	100

Table 2: Church Based Program Produce Ambassadors of Peace and Ethnic Harmony

According to the data analyzed on table 14 on whether the program helps the community to live as ambassadors of peace and ethnic harmony, 48.9% of the participants agreed with the statement. One way of effecting true peace is by becoming agents of peacebuilding and reconciliation (Magesa, 2003).

The Church can only actualize the potentials of peace building and reconciliation because this is her divine prerogative. Individuals and faith-based organizations from a variety of religious traditions are increasingly active in attempts to end conflicts and to foster post-conflict reconciliation between warring parties in various parts of the world (Smock, 2006).

4.2. Whether Positive Religious Values Emphasized during Church Sermons Contribute to Peace and Ethnic Harmony

The researcher sought information on whether church believers' exhibit love and compassion towards others as compared to those non-believers. The results are as shown below.
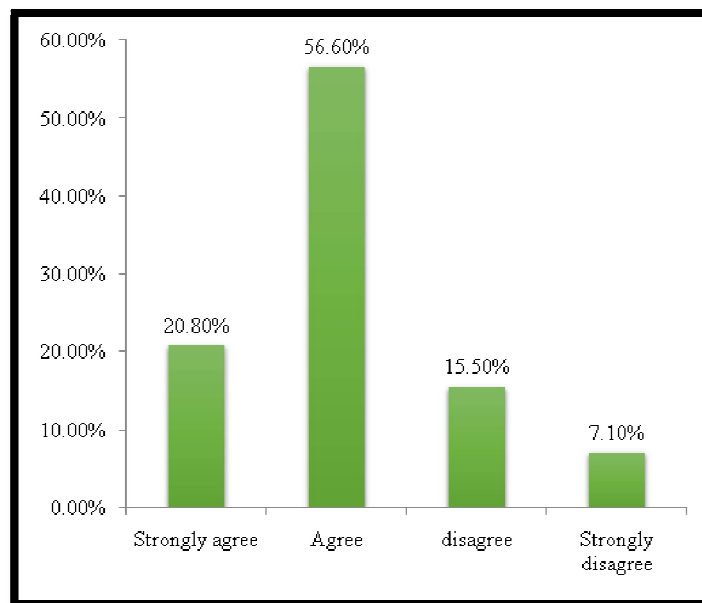

Figure 1: Believers' Exhibit Love and Compassion towards Others

Results in figure 5 indicate that 56.6% of the participants agreed that believers exhibit love and compassion towards others as compared to those non-believers. This implies that church peace building program instill positive religious values emphasized during church sermons contribute to peace and ethnic harmony.

Magesa (2011) equates that peace with conflict transformation and resolution. He maintains that peace is achieved only when the root causes of the differences of conflicting relationships are explored and resolved. He defines reconciliation as 'the act by which people who have been apart and split off from one another begin to stroll or match together again' (Ibid). He connects reconciliation with conflict resolution, but in his view, reconciliation has dimensions and more profound implications, because it makes an individual to transcend the ethnic affiliation and embrace the sense of love, which unites all people.

The study further sought information on whether those who had gone through the church based programs were not likely to participate in ethnic clashes compared to those who had not and whether they agreed or disagreed on most of the values taught during the church based program. The results are as shown below.

	Participation in ethnic clashes by persons on church based program		Community exhibit living to the values taught during church based program	
	Yes	**No**	**Agree**	**Disagree**
Frequency	80	300	298	82
Percentage	21	97	96.5	21.5

Table 3: Participation and Involvement in Ethnic Clashes

According to table 4.17 majorities (97%) disagreed that participation in ethnic clashes by persons on church based programs while 21% agreed. This implies that church based teaching and strategies on enhancing ethnic harmony worked to some extent.

Observing this tendency of human beings committing themselves to kill others, Joseph Montville (2001) argues that religious values have a very significant role to play in highlighting and reversing this destructive groups' process. This is the parabolic role of any church in society: to be a source of influence, in organic and pervasive ways as a free corporate decision-maker in the society. However, the pervasiveness of churches becomes a reality if all religious faiths realize that the God reflected in the Scriptures is beyond the Church doctrines as the living deity of the universe.

The findings further reported that 96.5% of the participants agreed to the fact that community exhibit living to the values taught during church based program contrary to 21.5%.One of the values of religion is that it sets both ethical and moral standards in the society. This enables people within the same locality to relate favorably with each other. According to Magesa, there are four core values that promote ethnic harmony in a conflict situation from a religious worldview. The

first value he notes is the fact that all human beings have 'human dignity' or rather all human beings are created in the image of God (Magesa2003). Second, human beings live in God's world. Therefore, as creatures, they need to accommodate one another. Third, religion or rather churches should help humanity to cross the boundary of negative ethnicity that characterizes our society (Magesa, 2003).

Churches should thus emphasize commonality of Kenyans particularly the essential characteristic of humanity, shunning the accidental characteristics such as political party affiliation, negative ethnicity and the geographical divides. Fourth, churches should preach the Gospel. They need to emphasize that justice is required for human prosperity and peace. Therefore, church leaders, as shepherds who tend congregations comprising diverse political, socio-economic, cultural and ethno-linguistic backgrounds need to be impartial on various standpoints as heads of churches. This limits divisions within congregations, hence harmony and unity (Kobia, 2005).

5. Conclusion

Findings from the study indicate that churches in Londiani communities have been at the forefront in fostering peace using various methods, particularly submission and confession, mediation, dialogue, peace workshops and peace visits. Conflicts recur because of the adoption of ineffective methods of peace building and reconciliation, ethnic animosity and lack of community involvement, political incitement and poverty. Ethnic conflicts disrupt the social fabric that holds the society together. The church has been at the forefront in preventing their recurrence using several interventions such as peace building workshops, carrying out civic education, community empowerment and exchange visits.

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