



TANGAZA COLLEGE

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF MISSIOLOGY

WOMEN IN AMECEA LOCAL CHURCHES: CHALLENGES AND HOPES

By

Romano Rokani Dada, B.A. Phil., (MCCJ)

Tutor: *Fr. Francesco Pierli, Ph.L., S.T.D., (MCCJ)*

*This is a long Essay
Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
Bachelor of Arts, Religious Studies*

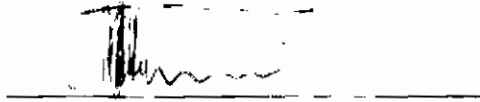
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Signed: Romano Rokani Dada

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Romano Rokani Dada', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is somewhat stylized and includes a vertical stroke on the left side.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to FR. FRANCESCO PIERLI (MCCJ), who has been guiding me in this topic. Without his patience, regular follow-up and very positive interventions, this Essay wouldn't have taken the shape it now assumes.

My word of thanks goes also to the LIBRARY STAFF of TANGAZA, HEKIMA, CUEA, AMECEA Documentary Service and NEW PEOPLE Media Centre for freely allowing me to use their books and other Library facilities.

I thank all my friends, fellow members of the community of the Scholasticate of Nairobi, and all those who, in one way or another encouraged me, and gave me their moral and material support.

Thanks to my Parents, Brothers and Sisters, who have always supported me in various ways in my Studies.

May the Almighty God bless all of you!

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INTRODUCTION

Down through the centuries, the African woman has played major roles in the socio-economic, political, cultural and religious development of society. Traditionally, women played the role of providing food for subsistence, were the primary agents of socialization, giving values, aspirations and moral foundation to their children and therefore being the pillars for the construction of balanced societies. Women also produced surplus food for barter trade and maintained the families when the men were out, either hunting, gathering, trading or raiding neighbouring ethnic communities for animals and more women.

Today, there is great social change, women's situation and women's roles are greatly changing as they become more and more involved in different activities. This change, which is to be found at different levels, is also creating new needs and challenges that have to be met. The role of women in the society and in the church deserves a special attention. This has become a burning issue world-wide and Africa is not an exception. It is this reality which prompted me to give such a special attention, albeit restricted only to the AMECEA local Churches. The Encyclical letter, the *Redemptoris Missio*, of Pope John Paul II, refers to the challenge presented by women as a new *Areopagus* to which he invites the church to direct her commitment. These challenges can be classified in to the following headings: social, cultural, economic, religious and political.

The recently concluded African Synod of Bishops came at a time when the African woman is so to say, rising from her down trodden social condition. She has been challenged to be herself, a true African woman, a person of dignity and self worth, a person who can participate fully in the church and society. The major challenge, however, is to rise above oppressive traditional structures, both in the church and society.

In Chapter One, of this essay I will analyse the situation of women as it stands in the traditional African set-up; considering social, cultural, economic, political and religious perspectives.

In Chapter Two, I will present a Christian Vision and Praxis, a biblical (Judaean-Christian) experience and a brief analysis of the situation of women in the course of the history of the Church, citing some relevant encyclicals and other Church documents.

Chapter Three, will offer some proposals to the Church and Society as to how to improve on the image of women and enhance their full participation in socio-cultural, economic, political and religious sphere.

This topic is quite broad and extensive, for it raises many challenges. An attempt to discuss it exhaustively within a limited length of an Essay like this one will deprive the reader of a broader horizon. In spite of this, my sincere wish is that while reading through this manuscript, the reader will be contented with the scope and the subject matter discussed.

CHAPTER ONE:

THE SITUATION OF WOMEN IN AMECEA COUNTRIES

Many women in AMECEA countries embraced Christian faith, yet deep in their hearts they remain believers or even sometimes practitioners of traditional African religions. This is especially expressed clearly in times of tragedies. It is not uncommon to see these women quickly resort to their traditional rituals for security and consolation. These women later adopted the roles ascribed to them by the church, that is being nurturers, servers and helpers - taking care of priests and caring for the needs of the elderly. They too cared for the needs of the poor and the needy in their own communities.

The mentality of undermining women at times diffused into the church so that the church under mines its own teaching that all the baptised are equally children of God.¹

Women in AMECEA countries try to assert themselves in various lay Christian organisations such as the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Catholic Women's Association (CWA), Catholic Action Group (CAG), Legion of Mary (LM), Young Christian Workers (YCW), and Young Christian Students (YCS). In all these Associations Women as well as Men collaborate among themselves but when it concerns administration and presentation of the women's interests, its the men who normally take the lead.

It is popularly acknowledged that women constitute the majority of those who attend Christian celebrations as well as contributing the greatest to the church's up - keep. Thus we can note that women are very active in collaborating with the church and they dedicate their services generously through various associations. These African women are struggling hard to recapture and reclaim their once spiritual and religious roles. In order to achieve this they seek to change the social set- up which is undermined through class, or gender. The women strive to eliminate physical, moral and emotional suffering of all women.

1. Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, *African Women's Legitimate Role in Church Ministry*, Innovative Essays in Ecclesiology (Nairobi: English Press Ltd), 1990, p. 63.

1.1 SOCIAL

Women are very little or not even at all involved in decision making in most families. Most parents (especially the father) prefers to send the boys to school while the girl remains at home because she will soon have to be married off (*See Statistics on table 8 in Appendix*). Even those who have the chance to go to school are encouraged to study domestic science (health sciences, nursing, cookery, serving, secretariat courses etc.) while the boys are motivated to aim higher by studying subjects such as maths, physics, chemistry, and other promising subjects.

While the right of education is now recognised as a human right having major implications for the empowerment of the individual as well as a key to social and economic development, all available indication point out that women's access to education is concentrated at the lowest level in all the AMECEA countries; Let us have a look at the educational situation of women in each of the AMECEA countries

a) ETHIOPIA

The number of female students enrolled at primary, junior and secondary schools was 39,411, this is about 39%, while the number of males in all levels increased every year between 1974 - 1985. University in-take of undergraduate girls accounted for only 10.9%.²

b) KENYA

There has been an increase in school enrolment by girls and though only 30% of the 3 - 5 years old participate in early childhood education programmes, participation by gender has been constant between 1989 -1990 at 51% for boys and 49 % for girls. From 1991 there has been a steady decline in the proportion of girls entering universities in the country, reaching 27% in 1992/93.³

2. Olive D. Luena, *The Role of Women in Development in AMECEA Countries*, frican Christian Studies, Vol. 12,no. 1 (March 1996),p. 13.

3. *Ibid*, p. 13.

c) SUDAN

In spite of the increase in number of schools and pupil enrolment at primary level, literacy rates are still low: 18% percent for women and 44.32 % for men (1980). In 1990, gross enrolment for girls in primary schools was 49.8%, compared to 56.3% for boys.⁴

d) UGANDA

The average percentage of girls enrolled in primary schools between 1986 and 1990 was 44.6% of which 50% will have dropped out of school before the end of the primary school cycle. Between 1986 and 1990, the percentage of girls enrolled in secondary schools increased from 35 to 36.6% but the percentage of girls attending technical institutions and colleges had the highest, 56%, followed by teacher training at 32%. At the main National University of Makerere, girls constituted about 25% of the student enrolment in 1990.⁵

This increased to 33% due to the government's affirmative policy in favour of girls. Women constitute 45.29 and 5% of the teaching force at primary, secondary and technical schools respectively.⁶

e) TANZANIA

The enrolment ratio for boys and girls in primary school was 50:50 in 1989 as primary education in the country is both universal and compulsory. There is thus gender equality at this level. There has been a decline of girls to 49.2% in 1990, 48.5% in 1992. Female access to higher education is extremely marginal; in 1980/1981 female undergraduates were 26% of the students population and this has been declining from 16% in 1985 to 15.2% in 1987 and increased to 18.47% in 1992/93. At university level, women tend to take either social sciences or general science.⁷

4. Ibid, p. 13.

5. Ibid, p. 14.

6. Ibid, p. 14.

7. Ibid, p. 14

f) MALAWI

At primary level, admission increased from 46% in 1980/1981 to 47% in 1984/85 and 51% in 1992/93, girls net enrolment for the first time out numbered boys at 60% and 57% respectively. Currently, 23% of the total enrolled at the university of Malawi are female, an improvement which could be related to the introduction of Diploma Courses in nursing and mid-wifery, which are entirely dominated by women.⁸

g) ZAMBIA

In 1980, 48% enrolment in primary school were girls and 52% for boys. In secondary school the enrolment percentage were 37% for the girls and 63% for boys; vocation schools had 22% girls and 78% boys and teacher training was 45% for girls and 55% for males. At the University of Zambia, the 1990 record shows that females accounted for 19.5% of the total enrolment and that the female proportion was highest in the school of medicine (33.2%) following up grading of nursing to degree course.⁹

There is a high level of illiteracy among women while at the same time socio-cultural constraints to women's access to vocational and technical education further reinforce existing gender inequalities.¹⁰

All available indicators reveal that the Africa girl child is discriminated upon in the area of education.

Education has been chosen by women leaders as priority for empowering women. Parents, governments and indeed pastoral agents are called upon to put emphasis on the education of girls at all levels. It is through education that women will succeed to achieve self confidence and to empty all feeling of inferiority complex. Similarly, through education men will learn to let go their unwarranted, unjust and oppressive superiority complex.

8. Ibid, p. 13

9. Ibid, p. 14.

10. Ibid, p. 14

1.2 HEALTH

Governments of AMECEA countries don't provide for free health services. Maternal mortality is very high in the region.

Table 1

TABLE SHOWING THE MORTALITY RATES IN SOME AMECEA COUNTRIES¹¹

ETHIOPIA	700 per 1.000.000 people
MALAWI	620 per 1.000.000 “
UGANDA	500 per 1.000.000 “
KENYA	225 per 1.000.000 “
TANZANIA	200 per 1.000.000 “
ZAMBIA	200 per 1.000.000 “

HIV/AIDS is rampant in AMECEA countries, it poses a threat and the most hit are women who in turn face the responsibility of looking after the sick and the bereaved family.

1.3 CULTURE

Women carry a heavy responsibility in our society. The core of the family as the basic unit of the society which establishes ethics, cultural values, behavioural attitudes and patterns that influence the conduct of individuals has become greatly challenged by prevailing problems associated with the increasing impoverishment of most households.

In traditional Africa, among many communities, especially those based on patriarchal background, women occupy very low status. Even in the matriarchal communities women are not completely liberated from social discrimination. While in the patriarchal communities the women lived among their in-laws, in the matriarchal communities, though they enjoyed some recognition, some important decisions were still being made on their behalf by their brothers or male relatives.

11. Ibid, p. 15.

The male is considered as the carrier of life. A woman's primary purpose is to bear children ... mother of the master ...¹² Women receiving their honour from the success of offspring. Marriage is not primarily an inter-personal affair because the wishes of the girl are often ignored. Dowry benefits the clan. Personal partner relation, mutual mental sharing and confidence are secondary, sometimes totally lacking.

Children born of any marriage are regarded as the father's property like their mother. The payment of dowry establishes the ownership of children to the father and the clan. The husband is not necessarily bound to sexual fidelity. Most African men are potentially polygenic i.e. have a polygamous mentality. Polygamy has for long been encouraged and honoured as a sign of sexual success and wealth. A husband indulging himself in committing adultery "does no wrong" and even does not hold the guilt of depriving her own wife. Forced and unconsented pre-adult marriages are common. In case of death of husband the widow is not granted an equitable share of the deceased husband's possession, instead she might be accused of causing his death.

The generally widespread exploitation of women is seen also from the way women are forced to shoulder too many responsibilities even in situations where their spouses could ease them their burdens. Most societies still carry a heavy burden of prejudices and beliefs about women. For example wife beating is a common practice among most tribes in the AMECEA region. For many generations women have watched their mothers, sisters, aunts, cousins, friends being battered, in a way this has made some of them believe that such is a normal way of life. Among the Kuria people of Kenya for instance when a woman does not experience intermittent beatings she begins to think that her marriage is at stake.¹³

Other forms of violence include female genital mutilation. This is a long standing practice in many African cultures where the Clitoris of a woman is severed purportedly to minimise sexual excitement which is thought to reduce a woman's sexual promiscuity. (See *the Statistics on table 6 in the Appendix*). Clitoridectomy is conducted during the initiation of young girls to adulthood besides this, there are accompanying instructions geared towards those sexual practises which please men. There is often a long list of

12 Aloys, Opiyo Otieno, Social Aspects Related to Violence Against Women, AMECEA Documentation Service (Nairobi: July 1, 1995, no. 463), p. 3.

13. Ibid, p. 5.

dietary restrictions laid on women e.g. pork, eggs, chicken etc., reserved exclusively for men. One clear fact is that all these evils spring from the view that women are men's property; be it the father, the brothers or the husband.¹⁴

1.4 ECONOMIC

The participation of women of AMECEA in the development of their countries is more or less the same as in the rest of the African continent. Women are at the fore front of the life and building of not only their nations but also their church.

Women in the AMECEA countries are basically engaged in food production, processing, storage, and preparation. They perform sixty to eighty percent of all agricultural labour, and about ninety - percent of all domestic labour.

Table 2

*THE DIVISION OF RURAL LABOUR BY GENDER IN AMECEA COUNTRIES
(% OF TOTAL LABOUR IN HOURS)¹⁵*

	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>
Cutting down the forest staking fields	95	5
Tilling the soil	70	30
Planting the seeds and cuttings	50	50
Hoeing and weeding	30	70
Harvesting	40	60
Transporting the crop from field to home	20	80
Storing the crops	20	80
Processing the food crops	10	90
Marketing the excess plus ferrying to market	40	60
Trimming the food crops	90	10
Carrying the water and firewood	10	90
Care for the domestic/cleanliness at stables	50	50

14. Ibid,p. 7.

15. Olive D. Luena, Op cit. p. 11

From the above statistics it is clear that women in the AMECEA countries provide from 60 to 80 percent of the food supply; they are responsible for a large number of important tasks including water and fuel collection, production roles, processing and preparation of family's food, caring for every member in the family including the aged. They also help their husbands with the production of cash crops. In parish compounds they perform most of the manual and welfare services which sustain and develop our church, lay and religious alike. They usually perform these works without any access to modern tools, training, or credit facilities and their work is given little monetary value.

Okot B'Pitek in his book *Song of Ocol* writes;

Woman of Africa

Sweeper

Smearing floors and wall

With cow dung and black soil

Cook, Aya, the baby on your back

washer of dishes

planting, wedding harvesting

store keeper, builder

Runner of errands

Cart, Lorry, donkey

Women of Africa,

what are you not?¹⁶

The burdens on women in this region and elsewhere in Africa are among the greatest in the world. As the African synod puts it, "they come from traditional vision which clearly manifests major form of the structure of sin engulfing our african societies".¹⁷

The fourth United Nations World Conference on Women held at Beijing was aimed to remove the remaining obstacles to women's full and equal participation, in all spheres of life, including economic and political decision making, to protect women's human rights through out the life cycle and mainstream women in all areas of sustainable development so that men and women may work together for equality, development and peace. But did

16. Ibid, pp. 11-12.

17. Ibid, p. 12.

the Beijing Conference achieve its goal and purpose? This question will yet have to be answered with time.

WOMEN'S POVERTY, INSUFFICIENT FOOD SECURITY AND LACK OF ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

While over 1/3 of the people of Africa live in abject poverty, and are unable to meet their basic needs, the burden of poverty falls disproportionately on women especially female headed households whose proportion is widening and has now reached between 20-30 % in AMECEA countries.¹⁸

Table 3

WOMEN HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN AMECEA 19

i.e. ETHIOPIA	33.3%
KENYA	30.0%
MALAWI	30.0%
TANZANIA	25.0%
ZAMBIA	24.0%
UGANDA	20.0%

In all these the number of female headed households is increasing steadily and female headed households are among the poorest.

With high level of illiteracy among women while at the same time socio-cultural constraints to women's access to vocational and technical education further reinforces the existing gender inequality.

In terms of development, most of the people of AMECEA region, live below the poverty line. AMECEA countries belong to the group of the least developed countries in the world. The Gross National Product (GNP) per capita is quite low.

See the 1992 statistics in table 4 below

18. Ibid, p. 12.

19. Ibid, p. 12.

Table 4

THE GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT PER CAPITA IN AMECEA(Figures are in US \$)²⁰

	<i>AMECEA</i>		<i>OTHER COUNTRIES</i>
ETHIOPIA	110	BOTSWANA	2,790
SUDAN	420	SOUTH AFRICA	2,670
KENYA	330	NAMIBIA	1,610
UGANDA	170	ZIMBABWE	520
TANZANIA	110		
ZAMBIA	290		
MALAWI	210		

Women's poverty implies also insufficient food security and lack of economic empowerment. While more than a third of the entire continent of Africa lives in abject poverty, with women most hit by it, they (women) constitute more than half of the population. Women have limited opportunities, do not own assets or co-own land and housing, although they provide for 60 - 80 percent of the total food supply.

1.5 RELIGIOUS

The participation of women in the Church today is of humble service despite the fact that most Church goers are women. If you looked at any parish set up within AMECEA, you will observe that women serve the church in activities such as: taking readings at the pulpit on Sundays, singing in the choir, cleaning the church, arranging and decorating the altar, washing the vestments of the priest, collecting Sunday offering (*Sadaka*), participating in entrance and offering procession, a few as catechists or teach at Sunday School. Rarely do they serve as leaders in the Parish Council and Parish Boards. These are humble services because they do not carry with them any recognition of importance.

The *instrumentum laboris* of the Seventh Synod of Bishops of 1987 - whose theme was "The Vocation of the Laity in the Church and in the World" - acknowledges the fact that the participation of women in the life and mission of the church is often more vast than that of the men (*See Statistics on table 7 in the Appendix*). However it must be

20 Ibid, p. 15.

noted that this vastness is restricted in such areas as mentioned above. Other areas of active participation is to be seen in Small Christian Communities, which at the moment shall be postponed till the third Chapter.

Although women are spiritually equal to men, they are socially and culturally restricted, controlled and dominated by the men. In independent church movements, women are participating more actively in neo-traditional religious and spiritual roles which enables them to participate more in the church's ministry. In this way they draw a much more meaningful role in ministry than in the catholic or protestant churches in AMECEA africa. The AMECEA women need ministries which are free from clericalism as well as more charismatic and dynamic in form. The catholic church in general and the AMECEA in particular could learn from the independent church movements by seeing how they allow women more roles in religious and spiritual matters and how they practise their ministries.

1.6 POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Women in Africa do not have any strong political empowerment. Infact there are very few women politicians in africa and most of whom emerged within the last two decades. History reveals that there has never been any woman head of State in africa, the hope of having one within the next decade seems to be a dream than a reality. So far the highest political post ever held in Africa by a woman before 1995 has been that of Prime Minister (i.e by Agatha Uwilingimana of Rwanda in 1994). How ever she never lived long to cherish this unique political achievement as she was brutally murdered during the Rwanda crisis of 1994. Long standing discrimination against women in africa has some how impeded women's full participation in politics.

Despite this, some countries in Africa are making very remarkable strides by involving women in politics. For example in Uganda out of the total of about 238 members of Parliament about 57 are women and the post of the Vice President is being occupied by (Specioza Wandera Kazibwe) a woman. In Uganda this has been mainly possible due to the affirmative action instituted by President Museveni.

In Kenya, only two women out of fifteen candidates stood for presidential elections for 1998. Although these women never made any significant progress their presence in the mainly male dominated political sphere was remarkably felt. It must be noted that no

woman so far has been appointed as a Cabinet minister in the 1998 Moi Cabinet line-up and only eight shall have a place in Parliament. Contrary to discouragement the future of women in politics in Africa is certainly bright.

In Africa, more than else where, the lives of the people are very much in the hands of the politicians. It is as if politics governs the private life of the people in their families.

Who else is better qualified to understand the lives of people other than the one who bore them in to this world? From the time of birth till death, the woman is involved in the life of every human being, male and female alike. This clearly implies that the woman is at the centre of all that concerns the human person. Then why not let them get freely involved in Politics?

With the constantly rising number of women actively involved in politics, there is an assuring hope that a real difference in politics will be made with the past.

Should women be involved in politics they will surely stand for justice and democracy, accountability and transparency, reconciliation and peace.

Women should be allowed let alone be encouraged to bring their feminine touch in to the political life of the AMECEA countries. They ought to be allowed to bring in their "feminine insight" or that "special genius", the specific gifts of feminine insight, compassion and understanding which greatly contributes to the civilization of love"²¹

21 John Paul II, Forum For Promoting the Role of the Women in Society, Message for the 30th, World Communications Day (Nairobi: St. Pauls Press Training School), January 1, 1995, p.7.

CHAPTER TWO

CHRISTIAN VISION AND PRAXIS

In this chapter I will present a christian vision and praxis. I will give a background of Judco-Christian experience and brief analysis of the situation of women in the history of the Church. I shall also give some references of Encyclicals and other relevant Church documents.

2.1 WOMEN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The condition of women in ancient Israel, albeit more advanced than it was in contemporary civilisations of the Near East, did not permit her to actively play a political and religious role in the lines of the chosen people. Since she was subject to multiple legal impurities, it was inconceivable that she would have access to the priesthood as well as having access to the sanctuary. In the old testament four prophetesses have been explicitly mentioned, Miriam the sister of Aaron¹, Deborah in the time of Judges², Hildah, at the time of Josiahs³, and Noadiah in the time of Nehemiah⁴. Anna in the Infancy narrative in the Gospel according to Luke may as well be added to this list of prophetesses⁵. Prophet Joel further announced that at the end of time after the pouring of the Holy Spirit, women as well as men would prophesy. ⁶

2.2 WOMEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Jesus addressed his preaching indiscriminately to men as well as to women. Women seem to have received it with much keenness. We read in the Gospel of Luke how the Jews

1. Roger Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1976), p. 1

2. *Ibid*, p. 1.

3. *Ibid*, p. 1.

4. *Ibid*, p. 1

5. *Ibid*, p. 1.

6. *Ibid*, p.1

accused Jesus before Pilate not only for causing riots and inciting people from paying taxes to Caesar but also entrapping the minds of women and children and causing the former to neglect the customary Jewish purifications⁷

Luke mentions that besides the twelve, some women too accompanied Jesus.

“Soon after wards he (Jesus) went on through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the Good News of the Kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joana, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Susana and many others who provided for them out of their own means”(Lk 4:18-19).

While according to Mark, at the moment of Jesus’ death “there were women looking on from afar, among whom were, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Younger and Joses, and Salome, who, when he was in Galilee, followed him and ministered to him⁸.

Thus Mark like Luke testifies that some women ministered to Jesus while he was at Galilee. After all the disciples except one had abandoned the master, these women accompanied him to the place of his execution and were present at his burial. The same women also according to the unanimous testimony of the four Gospels, found the empty tomb on Easter morning, met the resurrected Christ or his angel and announced the news to his unbelieving disciples.⁹ None of them is included among the number of apostles. It must be noted that the women who placed themselves at the service of Jesus during his wanderings in Galilee according to Luke did not do so because they had been the object of explicit call by the master, like the twelve but because they were moved by the sight of his miracles

2.3 WOMEN IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

As it was during the life of Jesus, many women served the master in his Church, in his apostles and in the poorest members of the community.

7. Ibid, 2.

8. Ibid, p. 2.

9. Ibid, p. 2.

At Joppa, a woman named Tabitha who was full of “Good works and acts of Charity” made tunics and other garments which he gave away.¹⁰ Mary the mother of John-Mark opened her house for gatherings of Christian Community of Jerusalem ¹¹. Lydia a seller of purple goods in the city of Thyatira, compelled Paul and his companions to stay at her house*. Paul in his Missionary journeys mentions how inimmensingly he, the apostle, benefited from the kindness of various women. “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a diakonos (Minister) of the church of Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the lord as befits the saints and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a helper of many and of my self as well”.¹²

Several writers tend to translate diakonos as deaconess in favour of the more relaxed translation - minister. If this assumption is true, then the order of deaconess can be traced back to apostolic times, thus implying that Phoebe was the first deaconess. It is easy to imagine the role played by Phoebe in Cenchreae. Cenchreae was a sea port linked to Corinth. There were many travellers and strangers consequently there stood many opportunities to practice charity and hospitality as well as offering her house for religious worship.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul mentions the couple Priscilla and Aquila, whom Paul calls “his fellow workers in Christ Jesus” a title he reserves exclusively for those directly involved in the spread of the Gospel: Timothy, Titus, Epaphroditus, Clement and others.¹³ Paul mentions that these two Christians risked death to save his life.

Significantly in Acts as in Romans Priscilla, a woman is mentioned before her husband, she might have been the dominant figure in this marriage.¹⁴

After greeting Priscilla and her spouse, Paul greets still other women, a certain Mary, then Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis, and all of who worked hard in the Lord. Paul then greets the mother of Rufus whom he refers to as his mother too. He further greets Nerus and his sister. In his letter to the Philipians he mentions Euodia and Syntyche, who “have laboured side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my

10. Ibid, p. 3.

11. Ibid,p. 4.

12. Ibid, p. 3.

13. Ibid, p. 4.

14. Ibid, p. 4.

fellow workers¹⁵". It is thus clear that Paul benefited from the co-operation in his apostolic ministry and that the women did not prove themselves less fervent than the men in spreading the Good News.

Although there is overwhelming evidence of women in Jesus' life, the passages in support of this manifestation were seldom quoted by the church fathers and those protagonists involved in shaping, and creating the church theology. There are a few passages in the Bible that have aggravated to the poor image of the women in the church.

2.4 WOMEN AT THE PATRISTIC PERIOD

The fathers of the Church were born out of a patriarchal culture which viewed women as subordinate to men. Thus in quoting the scriptures the Fathers chose to quote those passages and texts which confirmed their cultural views on subordination of women. The fathers quoted passages such as Gen 2:21 and Gen 3:1-7 to legitimatise subordination:

"Woman! you are a devil's door way, you have led astray the one whom the devil would not dare attack directly, it is your fault that the son of God had to die, you should always go in the mourning and rags" (Tertullian)¹⁶

"Among all savage beasts non is found so harmful as a woman" (John Chrysostom)¹⁷

"Woman is an occasional and an incomplete being ... a misbegotten male. It is unchangeable that a woman is destined to live tender man's influence and has no authority from her Lord (Thomas Aquinas).¹⁸

"Woman is a sick she-ass ... a hideous tape worm ... the advance post of hell..."(John Damascene)¹⁹

15. Ibid, p. 5.

16. Joan Chittister, *Women, Ministry and the Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), p. 3.

17. Ibid, p. 5.

18. Ibid, p. 5.

19. Ibid, p. 5.

From scriptural passages such as Gen 2:21 and Gen 3:1-7 to legitimise woman's subordination, Eve's role was thus seen as a child - bearer instead of being a helper to man in a broader sense.

In Corinthians 11:7-9, St Paul refers to men as the image and glory of God, yet he doesn't apply this classification to women.. The Fathers of the church interpreted this to mean that women lacked some essential quality which men shared with the God head.

In the post Biblical era, the role of women in the church came to be limited to comforters and nurturers and women were portrayed as being less than full adults in comparison to men.

In the 4th Century, there was an order of deaconess who assisted the bishop in rituals and in the area of women affairs. While in the Eastern Church the deaconess were ordained unlike in the West.²⁰

People began to see women as ones needing protection, to be separated from male community, observed, supervised and sometimes mistrusted. Even when asceticism became a way of life in the church, women still had to face obstacles to teaching offices in the church. They were limited to various religious and charitable deeds.

Patriarchy, thus assumed control over the direction and administration in the church. The ministries and roles of the women in the church developed behind the curtain of social sexual bias. This gender bias impeded the development of the equality of sexes as achieved through baptism. The male dominated tradition of the early church has painted the development of the role and status of women in the church's ministry till today.

All human beings are created in the image of God "male and female he created them" (Cf Gen 1). This equality which God has established of which we are further reminded of by Christ (Cf Mt 19:9) - equality of rights for the woman and the man in marriage should be reflected in the body of Christ which is the church.

The Gospel of Luke tells how women accompanied Jesus in his apostolic mission, showing all they had with him and his apostles: "soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the Good News of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him and also some women ...

20. William J. Rademacher, *Lay Ministry* (Middlegreen: St. Paul Publications, 1991), p. 151.

These women provided for them out of their own means” (Cf 8:1-3). If women were so closely associated with Jesus on his apostolic tours then this obviously implies that the possibility of a much greater participation of women in the church today is inevitable.

St Paul affirms that baptism does not allow any discrimination, for you were baptised in to union with Christ and now you are clothed, so to speak, with the life of Christ himself. So there is no difference between Jew and the Gentile, between slaves and free men, between men and women. You are all one in the union with Christ Jesus (Gal 3:26-28).

When this equality of all including men and women, is not recognised in practice as well as in theory, we are in some way obscuring the witness of Christ. The basic equality of all persons is implicit in the fact that Christ’s redemption is meant for every creature (Mk 16:5).

2.5 AFRICAN WOMEN DURING THE PIONEER MISSIONARY ENCOUNTER

Missionaries who came to sub-saharan Africa brought to the continent a church that was ministerial and structurally male dominated. These Christian evangelizers failed to recognise the significant roles played by women in African religious tradition where women participated in various religious leadership roles, for example, “As medicine people who acted as healers and counsellors ... There were women diviners, women seers, rain makers and women mediums.²¹

It is an acknowledgeable fact that both women and men in Africa were both recognised as worthy instruments through whom the divine communicates with humanity and people relating to the divine.²²

This equality of women and men in religious leadership roles as found in African religious tradition was rejected by the Christian missionaries who were educated in a male centred church. This does not mean that African women were not discriminated upon in their own African environment. Most African ethnic communities are patriarchal in nature

21. Kofi Appiah-Kubi & Sergio Torres, *African Theology en Route* (Orbis Books 1979), p.64

22. *Ibid*, p. 65.

and as such regard woman as inferior, yet in the area of charismatic leadership in religion and spirituality both women and men enjoyed equal status.

Traditional African beliefs looked at women as object of use, abuse and exploitation and source of wealth to their male - relatives who treated them as tangible property of their father's clan and after marriage property of their husbands.

Christianity as introduced from the west brought further fresh forms of subjection and oppression for African women. For example in the face of polygamy the women were forced to abandon their husbands whenever the man chose to become a Christian.

The abandoned women, now poorer than they were before, ended up becoming public property. Similarly the African women (as well as men) who originally were religious leaders would be asked to renounce their previous practices of seeing, divining, rainmaking mediumship, prophesy or healing and counselling as medicine people. The missionaries dismissed all such practices as evil exercises in honour of the devil.

2.6 A LOOK AT SOME ENCYCLICALS AND OTHER RELEVANT CHURCH DOCUMENTS ON WOMEN

a) PACEM IN TERRIS, JOHN XXIII (1963)

According to the mind of John XXIII, the dignity of women should be recognised and respected. " ... It is obvious to every one that women are now taking a part in public life. This is happening more rapidly perhaps in nations of Christian civilisation, and more slowly but broadly, among peoples who have inherited other traditions and cultures. Since women are becoming ever more conscious of their human dignity, they will not tolerate being treated as mere material instruments, but demand rights befitting a human person both in domestic and in public life (PT 19).²³

b) CONSTITUTION OF THE CHURCH "GAUDIUM ET SPES", VATICAN II (1965)

This Vatican II document stresses that: " ... Since all men (sic) possess a rational soul and are created in God's likeness. Since they have the same nature and origin, have been redeemed by Christ, and enjoy the same divine calling and destiny , all men (sic) are not

23. John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1964)pp. 8-10

alike from the point of view of varying physical power, and the diversity and intellectual and moral resources. Nevertheless with respect to fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, or colour, social condition, language or religion is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent. For in truth it must still be regretted that fundamental personal rights are not yet being universally honoured ... such is the case of a woman who is denied the right and freedom to choose a husband, to embrace a state of life, or to acquire an education or cultural benefits equal to those recognised for men (GS 29) The document continues to affirm that; "... Women are now employed in almost every area of life, it is appropriate that they should be able to assume their full proper role in accordance with their own nature; every one should acknowledge and favour the proper and necessary participation of women in cultural life ..." (GS 60)²⁴

This document however must be understood in its context for it has been written some three decades ago and since then the vision of life has changed and thus a new document could be written in tune with the contemporary signs of the time.

c) APOSTOLICAM ACTUOSITATEM, VATICAN II (1965)

The Vatican II council further recognises the tremendous role of women in social life and urges that their role be officially recognised in the church: "... Since in our times women have an ever more active share in the whole life of society, it is very important that they participate more widely also in the various fields of the church's apostolate". At the close with Vatican Council II, in line with the vision "the sign of the times" Paul VI crowned St Theresa of the Child Jesus and St Catherine of Sienna as Doctors of the Church. In 1971, an Assembly of the Synod of Bishops set up a Special Commission for the Study of Contemporary problems concerning the effective promotion of the dignity and responsibility of women. In one of his discourses Pope Paul VI said: "within Christianity more than in any other religion, and since its very beginning, women have had special dignity of which the New testament shows us many important aspects ...; it is evident that

24. Gaudium et Spes, in The Documents of Vatican II (London: The Anchor Press Ltd, 1966), pp. 266-267

women are meant to support living and working structure of Christianity in so prominent a manner that perhaps not their potentialities have yet been made clear" (AC 9).²⁵

d) DISCOURSE TO THE COMMITTEE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE WOMAN, JOHN PAUL II (1975)

The Pope further affirms that " ... If the witness of the apostles founds the church", stated Paul VI, "the witness of women contributes greatly towards nourishing the faith of Christian communities". "... Without discrimination women should be participants in the life of the church, and should be consulted in the process of coming to decisions ... (p. 266).²⁶

e) FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO, JOHN PAUL II (1982)

John Paul II acknowledges that right from creation man and woman were created in equal dignity. In creating the human race "male and female" (Cf Gen 1:27), God gave man and woman an equal personal dignity, endowing them with inalienable rights and responsibilities proper to the human person. "In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith ... There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

"... There is no doubt that the equal dignity and responsibility of men and women fully justifies women's access to public functions. On the other hand the true advancement of women requires that clear recognition be given to the value of their maternal and family roles, by comparison with all other public roles and all other professions should harmoniously be combined, if we wish the evolution of society and culture to be truly and fully human ... Therefore the church can and should help modern society by tirelessly insisting that the work of women in the home be recognised and respected by all, in its irreplaceable value ... for possible discrimination between the different types of work and professions is eliminated at its very root once it is clear that all people, in every area, are working with equal responsibilities. The image of God and in man and in woman will thus be seen with added lustre.... men should truly esteem and love women with total respect for

25. Apostolicam Actuositatem, in The Documents of Vatican II (London: The Anchor Press Ltd, 1966), pp. 500-502

26. Ibid, p. 266

their personal dignity and that society should create and develop conditions favouring work in the home. With due respect to the different vocations of men and women, the church must in her own life promote as far as possible their equality of the rights and dignity: and this for the good of all, the family, the church and society ...” (FC 23).²⁷

“ ... Unfortunately the Christian message about the dignity of women is contradicted by the persistent mentality which considers the human being not as a person but as a thing, as an object of trade at the service of selfish interest and pleasure: the first victims of this mentality are women. Besides, many forms of degrading discrimination still persist today in a great part of our society that affect and seriously harm particular categories of women, as for example childless wives, widows, separated or divorced women, and unmarried mothers. The Synod Fathers deplored these and other forms of discrimination in strongest terms ... “ (FC 24).

f) SYNOD ON "THE VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE LAITY IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE WORLD" (1987)

One of the recommendations of the Synod Fathers is to further study the anthropological and theological bases needed in order to solve the problems connected with the meaning and dignity of being a woman and being a man. “ ... It is only by beginning from these bases, which make it possible to understand the greatness of the dignity and vocation of women, that one is able to speak of their active presence in the church and in society ... “ (p. 5).²⁸

g) CHRISTIFIDELIS LAICI, JOHN PAUL II (1988)

“ ... Among all other earthly beings, only a man and woman is a “person”, a conscious and free being and, precisely for this reason, the centre and “summit” of all that exists on earth. The dignity of a person is the most precious possession of an individual. In virtue of a personal dignity, the human being is always a value as an individual, and as such demands being considered and treated as a person and never, on the contrary, considered and treated as an object to be used, or as a means, or as a thing. The dignity of the person

27. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (Kampala: St. Paul Publications), pp. 44-46

28. *Ibid.*, p. 45

constitutes the foundation of the equality of all people among themselves. As a result all forms of discrimination are totally unacceptable ... The dignity of the person is the indestructible property of every human being. The force of this affirmation is based on the uniqueness and irrepeatability of every person ...” (CL 37). NB: It must be noted here that Pope John Paul II uses the term “person“ equivocally to mean individuals of either gender..

“... As an expression of her mission, the church must stand firmly against all forms of discrimination and abuse of women. The dignity of women gravely wounded in public esteem, must be restored through effective respect for rights of the human person and by putting the teaching of the church in to practice ...”(LC 49).²⁹

**h) LETTER TO FAMILIES ON THE OCCASION OF "THE YEAR OF THE FAMILY",
JOHN PAUL II (1994)**

“ ... Man is created “from the very beginning as male and female: the life of all humanity. Male and female he created them “ (Gen 1:27), here we find the first statement of equal dignity of man and woman, both in equal measure, are persons. Their constitution with the specific dignity which derives from it, defines “from the beginning” the qualities of the common good of humanity, in every dimension and circumstance of life to this common good of both man and woman make their specific contribution ...”³⁰

**i) FORUM FOR PROMOTING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY: MESSAGE
FOR THE 30TH WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY, JOHN PAUL II (1994)**

“ ... Women must bring in their “feminine insight” or “special genius”. The specific gifts of feminine insight, comparison and understanding, greatly contribute to the civilisation of love ...”

This demand implies that the women must also be accorded the freedom and chance to exercise this practice.

29. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici* (St. Africa: Paul Communications, 1988), pp. 143-147

30. *Ibid*, p. 145

j) WOMEN TEACHERS OF PEACE, JOHN PAUL II (1995)

In his address to women, John Paul II acknowledges “ ... The growing presence of women in social, economic and political life at local, national and international levels. This he says is a very positive development. Women have a full right to become actively involved in all areas of public life and this right must be affirmed and guaranteed also, where necessary through appropriate legislation. I urge everyone to help women who are suffering, only loving and compassionate concern will enable them once again to look at the future with confidence and hope. Women have the right to insist that their dignity be respected. At the same time, they have the duty to work for all persons, men as well as women”.³¹

k) ECCLESIA IN AFRICA, JOHN PAUL II (1995)

The Synod Fathers unanimously request that: “ ... woman be given quality formation to prepare her for the responsibilities as wife and mother, but also to open for her all the social careers from which traditional and modern society tend to exclude her without reason. The Synod asks that a woman be given once again that place which corresponds to the real importance conferred upon her by the responsibilities she already exercises...” (EA 66).³²

From the above documents its clear that the Catholic Church is aware of the Social, Economic, Cultural, Political and Religious injustices placed against women and on her part she is ready to transform the situation so that women may regain that dignity which they had lost

31. John Paul II, *Women Teachers of Peace: Message for the Celebration of the WORLD DAY OF PEACE* (Paulines Publications, January 1, 1995), pp. 3-12

32. John Paul II, *Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Ecclesia in Africa* (Paulines Publications- Africa, 1995), p. 50

CHAPTER THREE

WHAT CAN THE CHURCH AND THE SOCIETY DO TO IMPROVE THE IMAGE AND THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN CHURCH AND IN THE SOCIETY

Made in the image of God, women and men have a preeminent place in society. Human dignity can be recognized and protected only by living in a true community. A true community is that which is free from oppressive social, cultural, political and economic situations and structures.

3.1 SOCIAL

In every human society, women are known to be closely associated with the building up of the community as an organisation and a place of Character formation of its members. Thus when a society needs renewal and transformation, the contributions of women are indispensable, even for community projects.

Bearing in mind the magnitude of effort, energy, commitment and sacrifice demanded of women if they are to play their part creditably to the full in the work of social transformation, a preliminary preparatory step is needed. There is need for the liberation and transformation of women themselves, of their attitude of dependency on men, their lack of confidence in themselves and in what they can achieve. In various ways women are responsible of some of the treatment they receive.¹ Self liberation therefore requires from them a consciousness of their lives true dignity and role in society, the courage to take their lives in to their hands and move towards consolidating the positive points while improving the unfavourable limitations. Self liberation in this context means discarding the mentality and attitude of being the “weaker sex” with the resultant passivity and inertia it

¹ Mary Gerald Nwagwu, *The Role of Women in Social Transformation in African Christian Studies 2*, Vol. 12, June 1996, pp. 46

generates². It also calls for the spirit of working towards a personal fulfilment through utilisation of God-given talents of the fullest.

Women achieve self liberation when they can engage in creative initiatives to better themselves and their surroundings: When they can organise themselves and co-ordinate their various effort in groups to yield maximum effective service to their communities; or when they can positively defend and uphold their rights. By sharing a communal objective, they can effectively support each other, identifying themselves in the pains of any woman no matter her background of origin, culture, language and colour.

With a consistent systematic programme adopted to eliminate the inhuman and the dehumanising factors surrounding them, women can effectively address societal ills such as exploitation, discrimination, oppression, mismanagement, deprivation, marginalization etc. by eschewing them first from their lives and homes, then persuading others by being exemplary. However, if they should record positive improvement, women should also take caution and choose the spirit of detachment from materialism, the consumerism and all practices connected with the social malaise such as excessive love and preoccupation with money, fashion, the good things of life and idle and easy life-style etc. These are baits that lure women in to compromising their honour and personal dignity. These would also enable women to pursue meaningful and self supporting occupation which will build up their self confidence and self-reliance, without lining on the men-folk financially and or psychologically.

To make an impact, women can form pressure groups and also associations especially for the realisation of these aims. They could also organise non-violent demonstrations and gender awareness rallies to conscientise the general public. Being in the majority, their effort to bring about change can never be ignored, for their supreme weapon is their numerical strength.

a) EDUCATION

Education should be chosen by women leaders as a weapon of empowerment of all women. In solidarity with women leaders all parents, governments as well as government agents should put emphasis on the education of girls at all levels. This could be done

through awareness courses for men and women aimed at gender sensitisation. It is through education that women will succeed to achieve self confidence and reject any feeling of inferiority complex.³ Through education, men would also learn to abandon the unwarranted , unjust and oppressive male Chauvinism.

Furthermore the educated and professional women should do all that is possible in their power and capacity to liberate their fellow women and the society, this is an obligation of Justice. Women must also be motivated to take leadership roles at family, small social and Christian groups, parish, diocese and national level.⁴

b) Health

One of the biggest problems of Sub-Saharan Africa is disease. Most of the diseases can easily be prevented if primary health care education is given. Primary health care education should be based on hygiene and preventive measures. This should take the form of family life education which is imbued with Christian and African values, the strongest and cheapest means to children, adolescence and adults to acquire new values and lifestyles which can combat disease and safeguard the life of the population. In the face of AIDS epidemic, this family life education becomes a must in every family and community.⁵ An appeal to all the Christian women and mothers is to undertake this change in our society. The Christian families should fully utilise the personnel and the programmes of family life education which is so abundant in all the Catholic Secretariats of the AMECEA member states.

Women constitute more than half of the world's human resources (which is also true to AMECEA countries) and are central to the economic and social welfare of societies. Development goals can not be fully reached without their involvement. Women therefore must have both the legal right and access to existing means for the improvement of oneself and society.

AMECEA countries have done so much to spearhead in the education of women, but unfortunately the education of women like passive virtues and private roles negatively

3 Ibid, p. 47

4 Ibid, p. 48

5 The Catholic Bishops of Uganda, *The Vocation and Mission of Women in the Church and Society Today*, Nairobi: AMECEA Documentation Service, n.474, August 1st, 1997, p. 8.

influenced the self image of women and their participation in ministry. Women must be allowed to actualise their potential and to freely participate in all ministerial roles. This is another way through which humanity could be restored to wholeness.

3.2 ECONOMIC

The contribution of women in the family, and the National economy and particularly in agriculture is immensingly great. Although this reality is often ignored or simply taken for granted by the society, all people of good will should join those who appreciate this great role of women in building our economy which would be severely hampered without them.⁶ This in response the entire society should acknowledge this unique contribution and do justice by empowering women economically.

The governments both local and national should seriously address the plight of women in the economy and design programmes with the women to uplift their economic status, thus empowering them to improve the economy of their families and of the nation as a whole. Women themselves should be conscious of discerning their own needs.

Laws, procedures and practices that discriminate against women at all levels of employment should be eliminated. Advocate for “gender balance” policies in both middle and high class people.

There is need to challenge all laws, regulations and practices that forbid women to have access to trading licences, travel documents, credit facilities, land and property-ownership for married couples, as a form of security to both parties especially for land, business and housing.

Husbands should work together with their wives in creating family self-reliance so that the standards of every family may be up lifted. Lack of accountability and transparency in family finances kill the spirit of unity and love within the family.

Within the private and public sector there are those women with double task of fulfilling their family duties as well as meeting their employment demands. In appreciation of their duties, employers should be considerate by particularly offering special attention and sympathy to expectant mothers, those with babies or with children of tender age, or with a member of family sick or disabled. Adequate maternity leaves should

be granted to expectant mothers, without prejudice to their contracts, pay , allowances and promotion. There should be equal pay for equal work for both men and women. Promotion at work should be based solely on merit and not on gender.

There are those associations in both rural and urban areas which educate and support women in money generating projects and activities of social promotion. The men should encourage their women folk to join and participate in such activities.

3.3 CULTURAL

The percentage of illiteracy ranks high among African women. She is often accused of the worst evils in the community, for instance witchcraft, sorcery, and soul-eating. Yet the woman is the back bone and the mainstay in Africa.

Thus the various African cultural practices that belittle the woman must be discarded and those valuable elements be enhanced. Most countries of AMECEA are redrafting their constitutions, it would be very good if clear articles in defence, preservation and promotion of women dignity are inscribed. One good example has already been set by Uganda, namely, article 33/6 of the National Constitution of Uganda which states that “Laws, cultures, customs or traditions which are against the dignity, welfare or interest of women or which undermine their status are prohibited by this Constitution”. All constitutions, law Reform Commissions, the Human Rights Commission and the entire administration of Justice, would ensure that there are no cultural injustices or legal obstacles on the way to the full emancipation of women.

The Church on her part should be on the side of women and should find out ways of liberating them from marginalization within the Christian environment by preaching and setting an example that opposes the inequalities created by culture.

3.4 POLITICAL

Women are slowly but surely beginning to take part in political life of the various governments within the AMECEA region. The few women who are participating in politics have echoed the voices of their fellow women, thus expressing their aspirations and hopes. Women should boldly stand for Justice and democracy, reconciliation and should promote non-violent means to resolve problems. Often politicians win sympathy of women by making empty promises or giving them piece-meal hand outs. This is often due to lack of

proper politicisation, those Women who are already actively involved in politics should educate their fellow women so that during elections, democracy may not be mocked by dictatorship and tyranny, or by instituting a regime that violates human rights. Instead, women ought to become the strong and untiring advocates of Human Rights; the defendants of the rights of family, children, workers, the handicapped, the aged and the sick and all those who are at some disadvantage.⁷

3.5 RELIGIOUS

All the baptised, women and men, share in the triple mission of Christ, through the sacrament of initiation. They are Priestly, Kingly and Prophetic People. Their common priesthood enables them to participate fully in worship and sacramental action. Their Kingly character makes them leaders and servants among the people of God. Their Prophetic mission makes them work unceasingly for the truth, denouncing evil and injustices and preaching the word of God without fear. All the baptised women as well as the men have an equal mandate from Christ Himself to go and “make disciples of all the world” (Mt 28:19). Baptised women and men are to follow the example of Christ in their lives and ministry. They are the Church, the Sacrament of Salvation and liberation for all people and the entire world. Catholic wives and their husbands have the duty of creating an atmosphere of regular prayer and meditation, reading and reflecting on the word of God as a family. Singing Psalms and Hymns in praise of God together and educating all members of the family, in the Catholic faith and practice.⁸ Mothers and Fathers have the primary duty of educating their children in the human and Christian morality and sacramental life. The family is the most important human and Christian school for all the virtues and values a Christian must cherish and practice. It is in this domestic church that women have to play their first leading role in the Priestly, Kingly and Prophetic vocation through the services of ministries we have just read above.

Taking the family as a model of the Church, the Fathers at the African Synod challenged the Christian family to eliminate all those elements which do not fit in to the image of the Church. Christian families ought to be communities based on love, they said. Communities of mutual respect, care and concern for every member, having genuine

7 Ibid, p. 8

8 Ibid, p. 5

dialogue with all, incorporating justice and constant reconciliation. It thus falls on all parents to ensure that this primary image of the church be realised.

In the AMECEA region there are many forms of families; there are those families headed by widows, single mothers and single women with children of relatives. There are families as institutes of orphans headed by women.⁹ There are the families of religious women living together. All of which deserve similar attention from those who preside over them. The women-heads of all these families are called upon to make Christ fully present and alive in their midst. The Kingly aspect of the baptised must lead them to service and in leadership of love, respect of and concern for each and every one. It is from families that each one of us comes, all priests, religious and civic leaders.

On the other hand the church has also much to offer to improve the image and participation of women in the church.

For instance the language of the church is almost exclusively male. The prayers of the church only seldom acknowledge that women, too are part of the congregation. The hymns sing of "brotherhood" and "fraternity" even when only women are in the church. The church should use inclusive language so as to accommodate women.

Women and men in the church ought to be educated to equality, and women's expectation of themselves has to be raised to human justice. To persist in describing women according to gender function is to continue to educate them in to bondage. The church could give women roles in decision making bodies. Clerical attitude and patriarchy in the church has denied the church its fullest actualisation and exercise of ability and responsibility since only the ordained men have the power to decide on issues, the rest of the members of the church have remained passive followers. The governance of the church and the ministries of priesthood could be separated so that one does not necessarily be a priest in order to participate in the government of the Church.* In this way all people (men and women) of good will would be involved fully in decision making bodies e.g. at diocesan commissions, chancery offices, parish boards, Episcopal conferences, consultancies and sacred congregations.

For centuries the church recognised the value and place of minor orders. Eventually, however, these ministries to the Christian community became consumed by the ordained

9 Ibid, p. 5

priesthood. The re-emphasis on the lay vocation and the call to participation and community commitment by Vatican II of the entire church as “the people of God” demands that the various gifts be identified and commissioned. Catechises, social service, pastoral ministry, prayer and liturgy are all charisms of the faithful. And most of those ministries have been fulfilled over the centuries almost entirely by women. It is time to define and stress again all the services of Christian community so that both church and priesthood can have full meaning.

It is time the church spoke plainly, boldly and clearly on her acceptance of woman as full human being. In every particular way the woman’s issue is the most radical of the justice issues. If the case can be made that one kind of human, the woman is genetically inferior and disposes by nature to a state of subjugation, then domination is clearly part of the creative scheme. A fresh encyclical would give a renewed impetus to a church ready for a new epiphany and serve to soften or at least to balance the insults of earlier churchmen against women.

Women have a central role and vocation in the entire life of the church. The fact that women can not become ministerial priests in the Catholic Church should never be seen by the women as limiting their full participation in all aspects of church’s ministry. It should rather make them more determined to play a leading role in all aspects open to them. The common priesthood of all the baptised believers in Christ should be well understood to enable catholic women to exercise their priestly vocation to the fullest in the Christian community. Women could also double their efforts in the study of Sacred Scripture as well as venturing in to finding new symbols that can touch the hearts of the faithful.

The church should spare no effort to preach against all forms of exploitation of women. On their part let the African women take their place in the church without any hesitation. If the church encourages the women to participate in church ministries, let the women themselves show a generous spirit of initiative and exert themselves with boldness in the service of the Lord. Every Christian woman is called upon to take her place and to play her role in the church-family, fulfilling her self-giving as wife and mother, teacher and apostle of the church in Africa.

3.6 WAYS OF INCULTURATING THE GOSPEL TO LIBERATE AND TRANSFORM THE CULTURE THAT UNDERMINES WOMEN

We have observed how the African culture looks down upon women. What role can then inculturation play in fulfilling Jesus' project, to set the women of Africa free from their cultural bondage that they may have life and have it in full? (Jn 10:10)

Inculturation is a concept (missiological process) in which the gospel is rooted in a particular culture and the culture is transformed by its introduction to Christianity. Christianity and culture are thus mutually enriched.¹⁰

Inculturation is a two way process: it roots the gospel in to a culture and introduces that gospel to Christianity. To plant Christianity in a particular culture is to initiate two events; first is to undo those elements in the African culture that point towards the human development of the woman as well as introducing the woman and her transformed culture of Christianity, for example by allowing the woman a meaningful place among the agents of inculturation.

If we are to introduce the gospel into the culture that oppresses women, then we must read and understand the gospel in the context and culture of women. This implies sharing too there joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments, there successes and failures, and even their language. It means infusing the realities of women's life with Christian values.¹¹ It means Christ again being born into that culture and coming in to that culture telling the African woman "Talitha Qumi" - Daughter arise!, thereby liberating her from the dehumanising conditions, so that she might have life and have it in full. It means the body of Christ the church preaching against all evils and any other abuses that dehumanise the female gender.¹²

Inculturation thus must be a source of hope, of liberation for the women, a hope towards energising and motivating the woman in bondage and the church towards the hoped for liberation. In Luke, we read the following:

10 U.E. Umoren, *Enculturation and Inculturation: The Gospel of Liberation and the culture of African, Womanhood*, in SEDOS (Vol. 29, No. 3, March 1997), p. 90

11 *Ibid*, p. 91

12 *Ibid*, p. 92

“The spirit of the lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (LK 4:18-19). The resurrection of Christ is a source of hope for us, a hope where degradation, misery and exploitation shall be replaced with Justice, peace, love and freedom, a destiny where “the people shall build houses and live to inhabit them, plant vine yards and eat their fruit, they shall not built for others to inhabit or plant for others to eat ... my chosen shall enjoy the fruit of my labour”.¹³ It is this hope granted us by Christ that urges us to work perseveringly towards the restoration of human dignity and humanity as a whole and the African woman in particular as God meant her to be at the end of time, namely, a person, a being in the image and likeness of God. A hope that implores the church to make decisions that makes that woman feel as having equal opportunities in education, employment and salary with the men, that she has the same right of property co-acquired with her husband before widowhood or divorce.

One of the contributions of women in the church is in ministry and I shall explain what ministry is and how much do the women play in this area.

3.7 MINISTRY IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

The purpose of ministry is humble service. This is evident from the word itself, and it is emphasized by the personal example and teaching of Jesus (Mk 10:42; Mk 9:35; LK 22:24-27; Mt 23:10-12; Jn 13:14-16) ultimately the service is rendered to God, ministry is done to people in that they are recipients of service. At the same time the person who serves is to regard himself as the servant of those whom he serves, thinking more of their interests than of his own. Yet this does not mean that those who are served are to consider themselves the masters of those who serve them or that the servant is to place the interest of the people above those of the Lord (Gal 1:10)

It is apparent that in the choice of ministers the churches looked for people with spiritual qualities that were expressed in moral uprightness and with the necessary capacities for the particular task envisaged (Tim 3:1-13)

13 Ibid, p. 92

3.8 THE CORPORATE EXERCISE OF MINISTRY

In the New Testament ministry, is a corporate activity involving several persons in the local church. There always seems to be plurality of persons exercising ministry in the church; some of them local, some of them itinerant, each performing different tasks according to the gifts bestowed on them by the spirit or in terms of particular function assigned to them.¹⁴

In this section of the chapter I will base myself on Small Christian Communities because they are the ways through which women have affirmed their leadership and generous contributions to the church, similarly small Christian communities are a basic direction of the church in AMECEA Countries.

Let us now look at possible ministries that can be undertaken by women in Small Christian Communities.

3.9 SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

a) ORIGIN OF SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

The emergence of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa, and particularly in Eastern Africa was partly a Catholic response to the emerging of indigenous churches and also an answer to those Catholics who were leaving the Church to join indigenous Churches. This idea did not originate from the people but rather from the concern of the Church's hierarchy. After a four year study from 1972-1976, it was recommended that systematic formulation of Small Christian Communities should be the key pastoral priority in subsequent years in the AMECEA region (AFER 1976/250). These SCCs, were to be the most local incarnations of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, while at the same time being self ministering, self propagating and self supporting. Facilitators began to be trained, who in turn went to various areas to train others and animate individuals and groups. The SCCs are characterised by bonds that unite the members and this plays an important part in the members' lives. The objective of SCCs is to go back to the basics of Christian life as expressed in Acts chapter two.

14 J. William Rademacher, *The Church and its Ministries* (Middlegreen: St. Paul Publications, 1991), p. 87

“All the believers continued to live together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another. They would sell their property and possessions and distribute the money among all, according to one’s needs. Day after day they met as a group in the Temple and they had their meals together in their homes eating with glad and humble hearts, praising God and enjoying the good will of all the people” (Acts 2:44-47). Although this is not taken literally, it is being used as a guide in living out the people’s Christian calling. During the AMECEA Plenary of August 1997, the AMECEA Bishops lived in small groups modelled on Acts 2:42 and 1 Cor 12:27ff. “They together as a fraternal community, united in the one Holy Spirit, listening together to God’s word, and celebrating together the sacrament of unity, the Eucharist” (Cf. AMECEA Documentation Service, No. 180). This experience confirmed and convinced the AMECEA Bishops that SCCs are a pastoral option for the Church in AMECEA Region.

As new model of church and a new way of being church, SCCs are a dynamic way for lay people to become active participants in ministry and evangelisation. Maria Goretti Rwechungura a Tanzanian lay woman states that SCCs have helped the laity to understand their role in the church today¹⁵

In The third World countries, members of SCCs take responsibility for their own faith life and local decision-making. The SCCs discuss and decide pastoral questions such as the following: request of parents who want their children baptised, different stages of Adult Catechumenate (RCIA or Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults); pre - Cana and marriage counselling, and election of lay leaders, etc. Many SCCs are responsible for the co-ordination of the ‘Sunday Service without a Priest’, care and decoration of the local outstation Chapel, religious instruction of children and outreach to the poor and the needy in the wider community. These are some of the many ways the laity can say that they are the church in their own locality.

b) PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS OF SCCs

There are a number of parishes without a resident priest. Along with lay people serving as pastoral coordinators of these parishes, SCCs thus play a very important role.

¹⁵ Maria Goretti Rwechungura as quoted in Joseph G. Healey, ‘Four Africans Evaluate SCCs in Eastern Africa’, African Ecclesial Review (AFER) 29:5 (October, 1987),p. 268

Much of the pastoral work and religious instruction is carried out through SCCs. Specific lay ministries in the SCCs are, prayer leaders, religious formation leaders, marriage counsellor, AIDS counsellors and youth animators.

SCCs challenge the individualism, privacy and high mobility especially in urban areas. SCCs can help to overcome the anonymity, alienation and mistrust in our big cities. As stated by one priest, SCCs are the most fundamental means of mobilising people to discover community, thereby overcoming urban isolation and alienation, to deepen our faith, reach out to those in need and analyse problems with reference to their broader causes and consequence¹⁶

Members of the SCCs are responsible for their own small community, For example to accompany the Catechumens in their community during the stages of the RCIA, visit sick members and to provide human support for bereaved families. Through faith sharing, members of SCCs tell their individual and community stories. God's self revelation through our contemporary culture and daily lives is a powerful testimony of the faith journey of the Parish and its SCCs.

c) SCCs ARE A GREAT HOPE FOR THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

We can be confident that SCCs will continue to develop in many different ways. In his new Encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul II, calls the ecclesial basic communities "a force for evangelization" and "good centres for Christian formation and missionary outreach".

He states:

These communities are a sign of vitality within the church, an instrument of formation and evangelisation and a solid starting point for a new society based on 'civilisation of love' ... these communities become a means of evangelization and of the initial proclamation of the gospel and a source of new ministries. At the same time, by being imbued with Christ's love, they also show how divisions, tribalism and racism can be overcome ... They are true expression of communion and a means for the construction of a

¹⁶ James Rahilly as quoted in Frank Breen, *Africas' Urban Crunch*, *Maryknoll* 83: 8 (August, 1989), p. 20

more profound communion ... They are thus course for a great hope in the life of the church¹⁷

NB: All research and statistics consulted so far reveal such an overwhelming participation of women in SCCs. I have developed this theme much more because it is both challenging and interesting, I therefore request you to turn to the appendix for a broader and richer forecast.

¹⁷

John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications-Africa, 1990), no. 51

CONCLUSION

After reading and reflecting on the various issues raised, I questioned myself as to why there seems to be so many contradictions between what is written in the documents of the Church and the praxis and actions of the same Church?

If the Church in Africa is to continue Jesus' mission effectively and build up mature Christians to serve as Jesus' witnesses, it must learn to allow the women full participation in the Church. All those who work in Africa stress the abilities and resourcefulness found among lay people and especially the importance of women, their strength, their ability to speak. They point out that women are a strength of the African Churches, they thus ought to be empowered in every possible way by the Church in order that they (women) may offer their services to the Church fully and generously.

As women take initiatives now in seeking new ministries and are as well invited to work in collaboration with priests and laymen and other religious in pastoral teams, new attitudes and new forms of accountability will result. This is certainly a challenge to the church and should provoke the Church to re-assess its own structures of authority.

Many new opportunities for ministry in the church have come through apostolic women who have seen a particular need and felt they could respond to it because they are women in the Christian community and are involved in nurturing the life of that community. Such new roles range from membership in the parish council and on the parish team to chaplaincy of schools and hospitals, and even to being pastors of parishes for everything except the sacramental celebration of Eucharist and penance. Apart from these direct forms of pastoral service to the Christian community, in the field of social action and development women have brought a dimension of loving presence and concern to such services as legal assistance to the disadvantaged, counselling in various areas of concern and helping to echo the voice of other marginal groups whose voice is unheard by the main stream of the society they live in.

Whether in the field of direct ministry to the Christian community by prayer services, instruction in the sacraments, home visitation, bringing the Eucharist to the sick and other various forms of pastoral services with groups or in the field of social service, the woman is concerned first of all with Christian presence and with the need to bring care and hope to

the community. The element of Christian presence and service is the main reason why women have reached in to other forms of service other than nursing, teaching and welfare work. Then if all (including the women) accept that these new forms of ministry are for service and loving presence, and are not seen as ways of proving that women are capable of something different, then true collaboration in ministering to the Christian community can get under way in a real spirit of teamwork, and the talents, dedication, insights and energies of both men and women are free to flow in to the community as forms of mediating Christ's presence, and as ways of helping people to come to him.

When Christ's presence is absent or too weak in a local community, there an urgent need for ministry strongly exists. Whether the minister who responds to the need is a man or a woman is not so important as to the fact that the person is one who is committed to the people in need and wants to give self in order to bring the love and compassion of Christ to them more effectively. The most important sign that Christ requires of all his ministers, men and women alike is that they show love - His love, which is itself the way the Father's love comes to us. This is the fundamental requirement, but it is expressed through the uniqueness of each one's talents and gifts: "All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills" (1 Cor 12:11).

The complementarity of women and men in pastoral team work will help to bring about that unity in diversity of which St. Paul speaks about when he describes the Christian community. Wherever there is co-operation in pastoral work, the church is enriched, for men and women are bringing together the wealth of their experience and insight in order that the love and care of Christ may be made more visible to the world.

Despite all the above obstacles, the AMECEA women are becoming prominent in the church, especially in SCCs. Their participation leads those who have seen their effort to Christ. They assume various responsibilities in SCCs and their opinions are determinant in decision making since it is they who have experienced more the various challenges and difficulties within the community.

If change has to take place in the church it has to come from the grass roots. Women are gradually realising that they have a great contribution to make in the social, national and ecclesial construction. At present they only help their own parish or region of AMECEA, yet their efforts could be extended to the continent of Africa and indeed to the

benefit and service of the entire world. This is a powerful witness that could facilitate to the spread of the gospel world wide. Often some men put stiff resistance against women's gender promotion. This might be due to the fear of losing control and privileges in the church and society. They seem not to understand that mutual collaboration, recognition and equality of the two genders bring liberation to both women and men. There are as well some women who act as barriers towards their own course. They have internalised women's oppression to the extent that they have become comfortable and do not see any wrong in it. In this way the women suffer anguish in society and in the church. Male chauvinism and ethnocentrism are major factors that create prejudices, fear and mistrust among women on one hand and women and the men on the other. Those directly involved in decision making in the church could soften their grip to allow women's capacity which has been so trodden upon be revived. It is very important for the church to create that climate of freedom for the women while the women give their own contribution to the church.

Table 5
TABLE SHOWING THE ATTENDANCE OF SCCs BY GENDER IN CHERENGANY PARISH¹⁸

<i>SCC</i>	<i>WOMEN</i>	<i>MEN</i>	<i>WOMEN%</i>	<i>MEN%</i>
Saint Mary's	18	6	75%	25%
Saint John's	20	5	80%	20%
Saint George's	9	1	90%	10%
Saint Theresa's	10	3	77%	23%
St. Luke's	18	2	90%	10%
Saint Anne's	25	1	96%	4%
Saint Matthew's	7	5	58%	42%
Saint Stephen's	13	0	100%	0%
Saint Maurice's	12	10	55%	45%
Saint Christopher's	10	2	83%	17%
Saint Francis'	12	8	60%	40%
Saint Miriam's	30	11	73%	27%
St. Margaret's	20	5	80%	20%
Saint Magdalen's	20	6	77%	23%
Saint Peter's	20	1	95%	0%
Saint Emmanuel's	10	0	100%	0%
Total	254	66 Mean %	80.6%	19.4%

From the table, the women's mean percentage is 80.6% and that of the men is 19.4%. A general survey of SCCs in various parishes reveal similar percentages. This implies that majority of those people participating in SCCs are women. The women therefore play a very significant and active role in the SCCs.

The SCCs in Cheregany Parish deal with crisis and problems when they arise. They do not have established offices for the different ministries. Each SCC has got a chairperson, a secretary and a treasurer. These leaders are either nominated or voted for if there are more qualified and experienced candidates. The office of the chairperson is often taken by a man, only a woman comes in when there is no male or when the male decline to do so. On the

¹⁸ Anne Nasiniyu Wasike, *The Role of Women in Small Christian Communities and the Church in Eastern Africa*, in *SPEAR HEAD*, Eldoret: (aba Publications, nos. 126-128), p. 185

other hand the offices of secretary and treasurer are taken by the women. This is more often because these two offices are work oriented rather than of leadership role.

The chairperson prepares the programme and keeps all members informed including notifying them on when and where the next prayer meeting would be.¹⁹

Meetings take at least one hour and they include prayers, Bible study and reports from the officers concerning the review of the events of the previous week. Sometimes the meetings are concluded by sharing a communal meal. Other times a priest conducts a Eucharist celebration.

The following ministries were being carried out in Cherengany Parish: Ministry of the poor; Ministry for the expectant mothers; Ministry for prayer; Ministry for the Word and ministry of Care and Compassion. Rarua Parish has even more ministries. These are: the Ministry of Burial; Ministry for the Sick; ministry for the poor; ministry for prayer and instructions in the faith; ministry for alcoholics and Sanctions; ministry for overseer of general Sacraments; ministry for Seminars; Bible Study Ministry, public health ministry and natural environment ministry. Most of these ministries touch each and every member in the SCCs, in Social, Economic, Cultural and Religious problems and are run and managed by Women.

Let us now see a few of these ministries:

i) ***MINISTRY OF PRAYER AND INSTRUCTION IN THE FAITH***

In both Rarua and Cherengany parishes, this ministry of Prayer and instruction in the faith caters for the prayer life of the group. It arranges and organises prayer in homes. In Rarua Parish for example, the members of this ministry are the ones responsible for instructing new members and children in their faith. They take care of the catechumenate and the Sunday School, as well as keeping alive devotional prayers such as group rosaries. This ministry has been exclusively managed by women.²⁰

19 Ibid, p. 186

20 Ibid, p. 188

ii) **MINISTRY OF EXPECTANT MOTHERS**

Carried out in Cherengany, and borrowed from traditional African religious beliefs. Members of this ministry are normally the older mothers who have passed the stage of menopause. They counsel and organise prayers for expectant mothers especially when they are faced with the crises of pregnancy so that she may cope up with it. The members of this ministry instruct the young mothers in those things they should do and those that she shouldn't. They may also give material help such as fetching water, cleaning linen and bringing firewood or doing some farm work. The prayers are organised in the house of the expectant mother especially in the period one month before and after delivery. These prayers normally called the prayers prohibiting the expectant mothers (locally translated in Kiswahili as "*Sala za kufunga wa mama*"). After the birth of the child other prayers are also i.e. "*Sala za kufungua wa mama*". During this time all the members of this SCC bring gifts for the baby and her mother.²¹

iii) **MINISTRY FOR BURIAL**

This was not really a fixed ministry as such in Cherengany, but whenever death occurred, all the members of the SCC got involved. In Rarua however the SCCs had a member, often a woman who was responsible for this ministry of burial. Her duty is to see that arrangements for burial is organised and the corpse treated with dignity. In case the dead belonged to a poor family this ministry ensured that a coffin is availed and Christian funeral rites conducted. This ministry also ensures that the widow and the orphan is registered in the ministry of the poor.²²

iv) **MINISTRY FOR ALCOHOLICS AND SANCTIONS**

In Rarua Parish, this ministry reaches out to alcoholics in their neighbourhood and tries to assist them in various ways. In the diocese of Kisii, for instance this ministry has a house called the "Half way house" situated at Asumbi.. This is a recovery house for alcoholics and many who have been to this house have seen recovery. The members of this ministry try to make their clients admit that alcoholism is a sickness/disease and that they need help. In case the alcoholic becomes unruly, the ministry has the right and obligation

21 Ibid, p. 188

22 Ibid, p. 189

to sanction him or her from receiving any of the sacraments. As often most of these victims are men, some wives could fear to report their own husbands and thus the SCC took the obligation to discover them.²³

v) ***MINISTRY OF GENERAL RECEPTION OF THE SACRAMENTS***

Its duty is to promote and ensure the general reception of the sacraments. Members organise the baptism of children and neophytes. This ministry also had the task of finding out those not yet confirmed and sending them over to the ministry of Prayer and instruction in faith. This ministry also had the duty to find those living in illicit marriages and ensuring that those concerned marry properly so that they may continue to receive the sacraments. Occasionally, this ministry organises marriage encounter seminars to strengthen the relationships between husband and wife and also make the youth understand the true meaning of Christian marriage. The ministry is undertaken by both men and women.²⁴

vi) ***MINISTRY OF THE WORD OR BIBLE SHARING***

In both Rarua and Cherengany parishes the members of this ministry help the people to link the word to the day to day life experiences. By facilitating bible study sessions the people develop a greater interest in reading the bible, so that the people may live a better Christian life, life based on Christian values and principles. Often the readings of the Sunday to come are read a week earlier to boost the participation of in the liturgy of the word. This ministry does not engage in solving the peoples problems by offering answers from the bible but rather directs the Christians to built a real contact with the word of God. In the rural areas most people are illiterate, so that those who know how to read are encouraged to lead this ministry. Parish level seminars are conducted to equip these people with the knowledge of how to interpret the bible. Sometimes religious sisters take charge of this ministry in which case they function as promoters. In order to give maximum freedom

23 Ibid, p. 189

24 Ibid, p. 190

to the laity to develop their leadership skills, rarely do religious sisters take active part in SCCs. In most SCCs, women are the arch participants in this ministry.²⁵

vii) MINISTRY FOR THE POOR

Aimed to care for the material and spiritual welfare of the poor, the needy, the displaced and refugees. Members of this ministry mobilise the entire community to find means to help the above categories of people. Sometimes through this ministry employment is also offered for the upright relatives of the poor so that the family may give direct support.²⁶

viii) MINISTRY OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND GENERAL HYGIENE

Most often the leadership of this ministry falls on a trained nurse in the community so that she/he may educate the community in primary health care; e.g. instructing on how to keep the house and the environment clean, how to dispose of rubbish, ensuring proper latrine pits, and over all hygiene. Instructions are also offered on how to avoid common cold, treat cough, malaria or diarrhoea. In some urban centres such as Nairobi, this ministry has proved to be of great help, popularly referred to as "*Uduma ya Afya*". This ministry also gives advice on proper dietary menu, instruction on proper drug use, dental care etc.²⁶

ix) MINISTRY FOR THE SICK AND HEALING

Takes care of the sick members of the community, arranges for the anointment of the sick. In Rarua parish the whole community takes part in the healing process. Sickness is still looked at as superstition and therefore the duty of all to be present at the bed side of the sick and be involved in the healing process.²⁷

x) MINISTRY OF ECOLOGY

This is a popular ministry in Rarua Parish. The concern of this ministry is to fight against deforestation and land degradation, which is often caused by over logging,

25 Ibid, p. 190-191

26 Ibid, p. 191

26 Ibid, p. 191

27 Ibid, p. 191-192

overgrazing, and use of poor farming skills. This ministry tries to educate the people on how to live in peace with nature. To truly live a human existence means having harmony and wholeness in vision that allows caring and responsible relationship with people, with things and with the world. The women in this ministry encourage people to plant trees and make the seedlings available to those who need them. They animate the community and ensure that the people do not plunder greedily nature's resources.

Today the African culture is at the cross-roads, and if it has to be shaped towards a holistic, integral and harmonious reality, it has to be shaped in relation to the environment, especially the earth which is the mother of all life. In the AMECEA region, the main source of fuel is wood, therefore if no trees are planted and the few that exist are cut down for building and fuel, the land will gradually become bare. Thus causing deforestation and subsequent desertification, the people of Rarua Parish although try to fend for their lives are also conscious that nature, which is the support of all life needs to be respected, protected and sustained.²⁸

xi) MINISTRY OF CONSCIENTIZING THE PEOPLE

The in-charge of this ministry organises seminars and workshops on issues that affect the community such as teenage pregnancies, natural family planning, community rehabilitation of the handicapped and issues relating to Justice and peace.

This ministry centres on education and awareness training and empowerment. This deals with all areas of development process in the parish.²⁹

xii) MINISTRY OF CARE AND COMPASSION

Exists mainly in Cherengany parish. The duty of the one in-charge is to reach to every member of the community who is lonely, widowed or orphaned or is estranged. She/he finds out their needs and concerns so that these people may be helped by the relevant ministrics.³⁰

28 Ibid, p. 192-193

29 Ibid, p. 192-193

30 Ibid, p. 193

xiii) *DIALOGUE*

This is another area of concern. Women are rather meek, persevering and keen in listening. They could play a major role in dialogue with women of other faiths and denominations without fear or suspicion as it is sometimes the case with men. This area is indispensable because women are the first teachers in the family.³¹

The above ministries in both Rarua and Cherengany have enabled every member be involved in SCCs to participate in building the community and to develop the sense of belonging and recognition. This is a further challenge to all Christians in AMECEA so that they may come up with more ministries in order to cope up with the peoples' ever rising needs. Through SCCs, the bond of friendship between the people has tremendously strengthened. All the ministries so far mentioned in the above SCCs aim at enhancing and revitalizing life.

SOME OBSTACLES FACING THE ABOVE SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Often there is lack of continuity due to irregular attendance of the meetings by the members which slows down the roles of the various ministries.

An entire SCC may depend on the initiative of one person, and when such a person moves to another place then the entire SCC collapses.

The clericalist mentality of some priests and laity (women as well as men), has made it difficult and sometimes impossible for women to freely exercise their talents in the SCCs. Yet the value of women in ministry and the role they play in the church is quite indispensable.

Table 6
The rate of women circumcision in the following African countries.

Country	Women Circumcised	Percentage (%)
Benin	1,200,000	50%
Burkina Faso	3,290,000	70%
Cent.Afr.Rep.	750,000	50%
Chad	1,530,000	60%
Ivory Coast	3,750,000	60%
Egypt	13,625,000	50%
Eritrea/Ethiopia	23,940,000	90%
Gambia	270,000	60%
Ghana	2,350,000	30%
Djibouti	196,000	90%
Guinea	1,875,000	50%
Guinea-Bissau	250,000	50%
Kenya	6,300,000	50%
Liberia	810,000	60%
Mali	3,112,500	75%
Mauritania	262,500	25%
Niger	800,000	20%
Nigeria	30,675,000	50%
Senegal	750,000	20%
Sierra Leone	1,935,000	90%
Somalia	3,773,000	98%
Sudan (North)	9,220,400	98%
Tanzania	1,345,000	10%
Togo	950,000	50%
Uganda	467,500	5%
Zaire	945,000	5%
TOTAL	114,296,900	50%

Source: NEW PEOPLE (Nairobi: New People Media Centre, no.46, January-February 1997)

Table 7

The Structural constitution of the Church in Africa

The Church in Africa	
Population	684,660,000
Catholics	95,613,000
Catholic %	13.96
Bishops	497
Priests	21,734
Deacons	297
Brothers	6,001
<i>Women religious</i>	<i>45,014</i>
Catechists	285,526
Major Seminarians	15,618
Parishes	5,257
Infant schools (611,168 children)	6,634
Primary schools (8,387,382 students)	25,527
Secondary schools (1,382,691 students)	4,831
High school students	23,891
University students	1,519

N.B.: Figures are in '000's

Source: NEW PEOPLE (Nairobi: New People Media Centre, no.39, November-December, 1995)

Table 8
The rate of Litteracy in Africa by Gender

Country	Total	Women	Men
Algeria	61	49	74
Angola	43	29	57
Benin	25	17	35
Botswana	75	66	85
Burkina Faso	20	10	31
Burundi	52	42	63
Cameroon	57	45	70
Cape Verde	67	...	...
Rep. Central Africa	40	26	55
Chad	33	20	46
Comores	...	...	...
Congo	59	45	72
Ivory Coast	56	41	69
Egypt	50	35	66

Ethiopia/Eritrea	...	...	...
Gabon	62	50	76
Gambia	30	18	43
Ghana	63	54	74
Djibouti	...	...	...
Guinea	27	15	39
Guine Bissau	39	25	53
Guine Equatorial	52	38	66
Kenya	71	60	82
Lesotho	...	...	...
Liberia	42	31	53
Libia	66	52	78
Madagascar	81	74	90
Malawi	...	...	...
Mali	36	27	46
Morocco/Sahara Occ.	52	40	64
Mauritania	35	22	48
Mauritius	80	75	85
Mozambique	34	21	46
Namibia	...	...	...
Niger	31	18	44
Nigeria	52	41	63
Rwanda	52	39	67
Sao Tome and Principe	...	...	...
Seychelles	...	...	...
Senegal	40	26	65
Sierra Leone	34	12	35
Somalia	27	16	41
South Africa	...	...	...
Sudan	28	13	45
Swaziland	...	...	...
Tanzania	...	...	...
Togo	45	33	59
Tunisia	68	59	77
Uganda	51	37	65
Zaire	74	63	86
Zambia	75	67	83
Zimbabwe	68	61	7

Source: NEW PEOPLE (Nairobi: New People Media Centre, no.36, May-June,

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