

Institute of Spirituality and Religious Formation

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INTERGRATION PAPER SRFW 003

**TOPIC: THE SPIRITUALITY OF EUPHRASIE AS AN INSPIRATION FOR
PROVIDING NEW APPROACHES TOWARDS THE CHALLENGES FACING NEEDY
WOMEN TODAY IN MACHAKOS**

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1:0 Introduction

The Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions (RNDM) are an International Missionary Congregation , founded in Lyon France in 1861 by Euphrasie Barbier. The RNDM have largely been involved in formal education with girls and boys at primary level and girls only in secondary level.

Since second Vatican council, in 1962 to 1965, which invited the religious congregation to go back to their roots, the RNDMs have moved away from running large institutional educational facilities, in favour of being closely involved in informal teaching with those on the margins. For example ethnic minorities, refugees communities, the street children and the needy women in the society. This was the spirituality of their foundress Euphrasie Barbier who had great compassion on the people who were poor people and had zeal for mission which enabled her to help many poor people in different countries despite of the travelling challenges. She had a special love for the needy women.

This paper will focus on how the spirituality of Euphrasie can be better utilized by the sisters today to provide new approaches towards the challenges facing needy women today in Machakos, Kenya, where the sisters have a project for empowering women called Muuo women project. The project was established in 2001. After my profession, I was privileged to be missioned in that project where I worked and interacted with these needy people for a period of time. The women are empowered with both economical skills and faith formation.

1:1 Back Ground of the study

A society cannot be without a woman. Women's problems such as forced abortions, poor education, heavy responsibilities, female genital mutilation, early pregnancies in girls, sexism and sexual harassment, domestic violence, imbalanced resources, for instance, health and education facilities, political instability leading to loss of lives, in the society are day by day increasing, gender imbalance in governance, violation of women rights especially in patriarchal societies. These issues emerge day by day as we read in the newspapers and watch the televisions.

Different institutions and organizations such as *(unicef) CARITAS*Religious congregations, for example, Missionary Sisters of Charity, Little Daughters of St Joseph, Most precious Blood Sisters and Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions (RNDM) among others, have joined efforts in addressing women's challenges; however, the issues are overwhelming due to high rise of the population in correspondence to economic instability. The RNDM as a Religious Missionary congregation for women had largely been involved in formal education for girls and boys in initial stages of learning, and girls only in secondary or senior levels of education. Since the introduction of the Vatican II Church Council from 1962 to 1965 which enforced the congregations to strongly embrace the initial fundamental aspects; the respective Charism and spirituality of the founders/foundress.

The RNDM in England, France, Ireland, Philippines, Bangladesh, Vietnam, India, South Sudan, Senegal and Kenya, has greatly embarked on informal teaching with much focus on the marginalized, which include, the ethnic minorities, refugee communities, street children and the less privileged in the society. These practices are geared towards the actualization of the spirituality

of the foundress, EuphrasieBarbier, who had a special love for the children and vulnerable women in the society.

Kenya being one of the developing countries in the world is faced by discrepancy between the rich and the poor. Some Counties such as Narok, Turkana, Marsabit, Kitui, Makueni and Machakos are enormously affected by poverty due to poor climatic conditions. The majority of the inhabitants in these counties, being women, they are the most affected by poverty.

The area of focus for the study is Kenya Israel where the RNDM run a project for empowering women. Kenya Israel is estimated to two kilometers from Machakos town and is inhabited by different ethnic groups which include Kamba, Gikuyu, Gusii, Luo, and Merians. The population is approximately 3,000, of which majority are women who live below poverty line. The researcher at the footsteps of the foundress, EuphrasieBarbier in her zeal to empower the women, seeks to deepen her knowledge on concrete modes of integrating her spirituality in addressing the challenges of the needy women in the contemporary society.

Inspired by Euphrasie's spirituality this paper attempt to provide new and more effective approaches towards the challenges facing needy people in Machakos Kenya.

1.1 Purpose and Aim

The studies seek to deepen the ways of responding to the mission of empowering vulnerable women in the society and provide some guidelines on how the RNDM can reinforce EuphrasieBarbier's Spirituality/ Charism.

1.2 The Statement of the Problem

Challenges facing women in the contemporary society have been addressed by various scholars. Dee. J (2017) discusses on the numerous challenges and the call of women in the society which include: heavy responsibilities in the families, poor health/death in childbirth, sexual harassment and poverty among others. He emphasizes on the dignity of a woman from the Biblical point of view.

O'Sullivan, RNDM (2015) observes that the non-skills activities, basing her study on the effectiveness of the Muuo project situated at Kenya Israel in Machakos County, is of great assistance to the women. She assessed the effectiveness of the project in addressing women's challenges such as female genital mutilation (FGM) to the marginalized. However, the issues affecting the women, for instance, the escalating cases of school girls' pregnancies, domestic violence, and poverty as reported by the media are some of the current issues affecting the needy women in Machakos. These could be as a result of degradation of morals in the society as well as rising of the population in comparison to the imbalanced/poor resources in some locations, for instance, in the outskirts of Machakos town.

High percentage of the inhabitants of Kenya Israel, are women who live below the poverty line. It is evident that in dealing with the marginalized, new approaches need to be implemented which will put into consideration the rapid emerging issues.

Samlowski (2011,p.7) in writing about informal training courses that people attend says that the aim of such courses is "in the hope of finding some kind of income- generating work when they finish" As the RNDM work with the needy women of today, they try to put this into practice by empowering the women with skills such as sewing, beads work, knitting, tie and dye, soap making

among others. They also have seminars and faith formation programmes. During the seminars the women share with one another and through their sharing they gain new insight on how to handle some challenges in the family.

Euphrasie Barbier the foundress of the RNDM had a special love for women and girl child which continues to inspire the RNDMs even today. Through her letters, for example letter to mother Mary of the Redemption, Wellington, 20th September 1873 she says “Our training of some women as pupil-teachers who could later on become good teachers for their own people, and also the training of others with an inclination for manual work, in a sort of Technical school which has already begun and for which he has promised assistance.....” has been approved by the Mclean, minister for Maoris affairs. This shows that she worked closely with government officials to empower the needy people in the society especially women.

Euphrasie Barbier says in another letter to Reverend father Philpin De Riviere, in 15th January 1877, “ We opened a school for he young girls who work in the linen factories. They come to us for two hours study each day. On Sundays and holidays they also come for study and recreation.

The RNDMs are very much encouraged by their foundress letters and her spirituality to continue with the mission of working with the needy people in the society with a particular love on the poor women. It is through the spirituality of RNDMs foundress that a project for empowering needy women in the society was begun in the year 2001.

In order for the RNDMs to empower the needy people today in a more effective way, this integration paper offers some approaches such as; To have a well-established administration, to invite the Alumni of the project who have been empowered in different areas to give workshops to the current women in the project, To involve the staffs to share the ideas concerning the smooth

running of the project, To listen to the learners' concerns and issues with love and together come up with solution, to have some days for workshops spiritual life and family matters and lastly to treat each person as an individual and a mature person.

Rationale/Justification of the Study

The researcher seeks to deepen the knowledge on the spirituality/ Charism of the RNDM leading to the integration of it, in attempt to provide new approaches of handling the challenges of needy women in contemporary society.

The study is helpful in creating awareness of the challenges of women in Kenya Israel Machakos and provide some guidelines on how to approach the challenges better by use of Euphrasie's spirituality/ Charism.

Scope and Delimitation of the study

The study attempted to provide new approaches of dealing with challenges facing women today based on the spirituality and charism of Euphrasie Barbier the foundress of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions (RNDM).

There are various women training institutions run by other congregations within Machakos such as the Caritas situated in Machakos town and another women training situated in Miwani run by Sisters of Our Lady of Sorrows. However, the study focused on the Muuo Women Project particularly in Kenya Israel Machakos County, run by the RNDM sisters.

Some scholars for example Jee Dee, approaches of dealing with challenges of women in the society was based on Biblical point of view. In schools there are lessons on life skills taught especially on morals. However, this is not enough.

The researcher integrated spirituality/charism of Euphrasie Barbier to provide basic approaches on dealing with the challenges facing women. Some of the challenges faced by women in Kenya Israel are; early marriage and early pregnancies, domestic violence and poverty. Some of the challenges might be caused by misuse of media whereby a person end up practicing what she sees on the media for example genital sex. As a consequence she ends up conceiving and being married by someone who does not love her and becoming a house wife who is entirely depended on her husband. Because such kind of marriage are not built on love, the man starts disrespecting his wife and even beating her very often with no reason.

The researcher would like to create awareness to the women in the society by teaching them the importance of proper use of media and the benefits we get from media by proper use of it. The researcher integrated the Euphrasie's spirituality which is about empowering women with skills like sewing, tie and dye, catering and faith formation by encouraging them to join Muuo Women Project where all this skills are offered.

Difficulties and how they were overcome

The research information relied solely on the information from the internet sources, church document, congregation constitution and document. There is a lot of information concerning women empowerment from the internet. Euphrasie Barbier our foundress wrote different books and letters concerning the importance of empowering women. The researcher did not have enough time to gather all the information from the sources available. Therefore time factor was a challenge. To overcome this the researcher focused on the internet sources which have been recently written and also read the congregations document which directly talk about women as well as church documents.

Methodology

The researcher used the internet sources, church documents, congregation constitution and documents and finally, researcher's personal reflection on the Euphrasie's spirituality and the empowerment of women.

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