

The Role of Laity in Fostering the Integration of Christian Faith into Daily

Living: A Case of the Methodist Church in the Kaaga Synod

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Abstract

The Church is expected to infuse the world and provide moral compass to her followers. Laity is key in this infusion. However, there is a noticeable gap in laity as regards fostering the integration of faith in daily living. This paper aims to assess the role of laity in fostering integration of Christian faith into daily living within the Methodist Church in the Kaaga Synod. The purpose of the study is to suggest measures for addressing the disengagement of the laity's lives from Christian teachings. The study proposes a constructivism paradigm, and adopted a descriptive research design. The target population was 39,000 members of the 205 churches in 27 circuits that make up Kaaga synod. The sample size was 380 respondents consisting of 339 church members, 32 lay leaders (including men, women, youth and circuit stewards), 8 superintendent ministers /clergy, and 1 synod Bishop. Data was collected using open-ended questionnaires for church members, interviews for lay leaders, focus group discussions for superintendent ministers, and documentary analysis for synod reports and minutes. The quality of data was ensured by checking content, construct, criterion, bracketing, and testimonial validities. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Kenya Methodist University, ethics review committee. Data was analyzed thematically. The study found out laxity among church members to receive Christian teachings, and deficiency of personal responsibility in the practice of Christian teachings as well as individualism that negatively affected implementation of laity programs. The study recommended laity to focus on their individual spiritual development and also engage in social activities that promote justice, peace, and a balance between their spiritual and social dimensions.

Keywords: *Laity, Integration, Christian faith, daily living, Methodist Church.*

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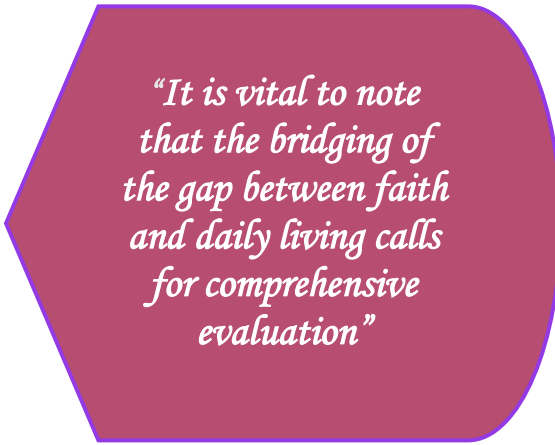
1.0 Introduction

The practice of Christian faith in daily living which entails application of Christian principles and values, is a central target for believers (Pali 2020). The ability of a church community to effectively facilitate this integration is a crucial role in nurturing spiritual growth and guidance of members towards a life that aligns with their faith (Olorunnisola, 2015). The role of laity in integrating Christian faith into daily living becomes a topic of substantial importance in the evaluation Christian living. Kaaga Synod of the Methodist Church in Kenya faces the challenge of bridging the gap between the Christian teachings and their practical application in the lives of its members. It is within this context that the analysis of the role of laity in integration of Christian faith into daily living becomes imperative.

This research analyzed the role of laity in integrating Christian faith into daily living within the Methodist Church in the Kaaga Synod with the ultimate goal of enhancing laity's ability to live out their Christian faith authentically in all places within their existence. Laity constructs included their scope of interaction, their role in mission and evangelism, Christian attitude, and general social status. It is vital to note that the bridging of the gap between faith and daily living calls for comprehensive evaluation.

A qualitative research approach was used in analyzing the role of laity in integrating Christian faith in daily aspects of living within the Kaaga Synod. Data was collected through questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary

analysis. The findings of this study will be helpful to laymen and laywomen in Kaaga synod and beyond. The study will also contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the role of laity in Christian life and practice. This research recommends that laity be engaged in social activities that promote justice, peace and the common good for all, and also become intentional in receiving and practicing Christian teachings geared towards developing accountability teams for healthy interactions.



“It is vital to note that the bridging of the gap between faith and daily living calls for comprehensive evaluation”

Practical Christianity in everyday life has been a great challenge to Christians across the world throughout the history of Christianity (Hoffman, 2017). The Methodist Church in Kenya, Kaaga synod, being part of the global Christian community, is not an exception to this struggle. Fear (2019) documented numerous spaces where Christians can exhibit integration, justice, benevolence, intelligence, and compassion. These areas highlight the need for the church to dynamically engage the public in promoting holistic living through integration of faith into daily life.

Wesley introduced class meetings and holy clubs of the Methodist that largely aided the practice of Christian teachings (Hall, 2019). These clubs and meetings provided platform for the laity to read scripture, share personal testimonies, sing hymns, pray together, and support each other in living according to biblical teachings (Hall, 2019). Wesley emphasized the aspect of social holiness in inspiring Christians to live out their faith, not only in private, but also in the marketplace. This formed accountability and support system within holy clubs and class meetings, which fostered spiritual growth and enabled Methodists to manifest their faith in their daily lives. Therefore, the role of the laity in the integration of Christian faith into daily living entails commitment and active partaking in various roles and responsibilities in and beyond the Church confines (Roux et al., 2016).

In the present world, many changes have taken place, triggered by emphasis on the prime role of the church as an agent of transformation (Bosch, 2016). Bosch noted that many of the church members in the world have never comprehended their role in integrating other interests such as politics, alliance, culture and governance.

It is vital noting that several scholars have written on faith integration in specific areas such as education, psychology, medicine, and business. However, there has been dearth of literature on the role of laity in daily application of Christian teachings (Beech, 2018; Matise & Mosci, 2017; Santrac, 2016; Laine & Kelly, 2016). The purpose of this study therefore was to address this gap within the Methodist Church in Kenya, Kaaga

Synod. This analysis aims at providing recommendations to the Church lay people on how to live out their Christian faith consistently. Qualitative research approach was adopted. Data was gathered using questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary analysis. The findings of this research will contribute to better understanding of the role of laity in integrating Christian faith into their daily living, and inform on development of effective laity strategies and initiatives for the Methodist Church in the Kaaga Synod and beyond. Generally, the research seeks to address the disconnection between Christian teachings and their practical application in daily life of the laity.

Statement of the problem

It is generally expected that Christians incorporate the teachings they receive on Sunday services and weekday fellowships into everything they do throughout the week by connecting, embracing and embedding them in all spheres of life (Liske, 2015). This means that Christians are supposed to propagate the gospel in words and deeds, not only in the pulpits, but also in their everyday life; may it be in the family, in public square or in any other daily commitment. According to Liske (2015), this integration will be impactful, persistent, representative, transformative, consistent, educative and motivating to even the non-Church populace. However, upholding Christian practices in everyday life has been a main challenge to Christians across the world and throughout the history of Christianity (Hoffman, 2017). A gap between the "hearing" and the "doing" of the Christian teachings is evident and has

resulted to lack of continuity in integrating Christian teachings into daily living by some Christians (NIV, James 1:22).

The Methodist Church in Kenya, Kaaga synod, being part of the global Christian community is not an exception in this struggle. Fear (2019) documented numerous spaces where Christians can exhibit integration, including credibility, justice, benevolence, intelligence, and compassion. These areas highlight the need for the church to dynamically engage the public in promoting holistic living through integration of faith into daily living. The Methodist Church in Kenya, Kaaga Synod also faces challenge of the laity in fostering Christian teachings in all the aspects of their lives.

Church reports and minutes exposed cases of sorcery, involvement in anti-Christian cultures, family conflicts, and moral transgressions, despite the presence of the laity in all fields of operations. (MCK-Kaaga Synod, 2020). Moreover, there is deficiency of consistent ways on how laity propagates the integration of faith into daily life through engagements, particularly in the marketplace. Various scholars have addressed diverse aspects of faith integration in specific contexts; however, none has touched on the role of laity in fostering the integration of its teachings into daily living (Neubert & Doughert, 2015; Armstrong, 2015; Haris, 2014).

Research Objective

To analyze the role of laity in Methodist Church in Kenya, Kaaga Synod, in fostering

the integration of Christian faith into daily living.

Research Question

Do the lay people foster the integration of Christian faith into the daily living in the Methodist Church in Kenya, Kaaga Synod?

Literature Review

The integration of Christian faith into all the areas of daily living is very vital in character, moral, ethical and spiritual formation of a Christian. Laity is deemed a receptacle through which Christian teachings, God and His Kingdom are channeled to earth. This pronounces that the laity are expected to consistently embark on an enormous duty to be relevant and positively influence the public, congregations, and to the world at large. The laity are widespread and encompasses all areas of life, and all places of the world (MCguire, 2020).

It is through this personal initiative that church members highly participate in holistic integration of Christian faith into daily living (Leanne, 2020). Volgt (2021) asserts that it is the communion of believers, and particularly the laity who occupy various spaces, such as, agriculture, business, teachers, day-laborers, clergymen, or leaders in the community that can best see their community through God's worldview and dimensions. This means that they can understand how God's guidelines and teachings need to be propagated through his wisdom and desire for people to prosper spiritually, physically, mentally, and socially. In the United States of America, particularly in New York, the laity are deemed to have understood the Christian transformation

welfares of the society as a central factor in their mission agenda (Jackson, 2017; Wachiya, 2015). Therefore, the laity need to be explicit in advocating for the transformation on themselves and the rest of the world. As such, the role of the laity becomes very critical in integrating Christian teachings into daily life.

Emadi (2019) noted that the laity have a responsibility to exercise the principal of priesthood of all believers by not excessively depending on pastors. Pali (2020) agrees with Emadi in urging that the laity need to be active so as to avoid playing spectators. To do this, they are encouraged to be propagators of Christian teachings on daily basis, and in their daily spheres of influence. A study in Korea by Choi (2020) indicated that Christianity in modern Korea is a lived experience embedded in self-discipline, humility and diligence. Agreeing with Choi, another study from Korea by Son (2018) noted that there are Church –based social ties in Korea which are seen to be conducive for belongingness and close relationships that ensure one-on –one relationship. This could be an established way of aiding integration of Christian faith in all aspects of human life.

From the Nigerian context, Obiorah (2020) affirms that the church lay members occupy every region of life which makes them to be in a prime position to reach out easily and conveniently. Copeland (2018) also agrees with Obiorah by affirming that all the laity are called by God to His kingdom irrespective of their careers. This implies that laity comprise not only the ordained

ministers, but also every Christian that is called into reach-out endeavor.

Olorunnisola (2015) accentuates that the mere knowledge about Christ stands insufficient if it cannot be exercised all through for the purpose of influencing the bigger population outside the confines of the community of faith. Olorunnisola (2015) insists that ‘no Christology without Christo-praxis’. In other words, the knowledge of Christ needs to be aligned and in agreement with the practice of Christ. This study mainly dealt with ‘Christo-praxis’. Christo-praxis refers to the practice of Christian teachings on daily basis. The lay people are expected to be influential in their endeavor to foster integration of Christian faith into daily living.

Echoing the idea of Christo-praxis, Dames (2017) clarifies that Christo-praxis carries with it the acts of practical theology which finds itself within the multiplicity of human practice, which is domiciled in the multifarious network of human interactions that form the fabric of all experiences. Centering on designated Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in Ghana, Benyah (2020) argues that there has to be intentional holistic approach by the laity in their mission theologies and agenda that incorporate all features of daily living.

Wairimu (2017) argues that the lay members in Kenya have created a low level of interaction with other Christians. This has led to their minimal influence. The Church notion is that all people were created to co-exist interdependently, and therefore their interactions remain very crucial in

influencing each other into godliness. Wairimu further noted that it is within their interactions and co-existence that the Christians get to comprehend themselves in a wider perspective even in their relationship with God as they assist others too. Scott Roberts (2023) noted that accountability is an essential aspect of Christian faith; particularly, in the place of being answerable and caring to one another in deeds, utterances, and attitudes. It is in this way that lay people are able to interrelate, promote with understanding, mentor and influence each other in all aspects of daily living through practicing Christian teachings and constantly nurturing a godly society (Tah, 2016).

It is fundamental to note that when members of the laity mutually interact with the rest of the public (non-Church members), they discover each other and the challenges which affect them (Marshall & Van, 2017). The Church, through the laity; therefore, offers inspirational and passionate actions that identify and weave the community together irrespective of what could be the prevailing circumstances, hence making the Christian faith to be at the center of the people in the community.

Snider (2019) indicates that historically, churches occupied a position of impact and inspiration in various communities. This reveals that in the past, several institutions like hospitals, colleges, schools and other societal services came into being as a result a vision by the missionaries' response to the gospel in obedience to Jesus' great commission. Their mission was to take care

of the poor, dress the naked, care and protect orphans, and to visit the imprisoned. Churches were noticeable anchors in several communities, and they were factually accorded a key domicile in various spheres that were represented in the market place. Snider brings to focus the present situation where churches are often reduced in importance and put to the peripheries in the market places. This leaves a question of whether the Church will ever get back to be the center of influence across the cultures of the world.

2.0 Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Kaaga Synod of the Methodist Church in Kenya. Kaaga Synod is located in Meru County, in the Eastern part of Kenya, and it comprises of North Imenti, South Imenti, Central Imenti, and Buuri sub-counties. The choice of Kaaga Synod as the study site stems from its historical significance as the origin and mother synod of the Methodist Church in the region since 1912 (Nthamburi, 1982).

The study proposes a constructivism philosophy, and adopts a descriptive survey research design, qualitative research approach. The target population consisted of 27 circuits in Kaaga synod, which has a total of 205 churches with 39,000 members. The sample population included 1 synod bishop, 8 circuit superintendents, 8 circuit ministers, 8 leaders for each women, men, youth fellowships and 339 church members. A sample size of 380 was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula. Proportionate random sampling was employed to ensure adequate representation

from the circuits and groups within the synod. Church members were selected using simple random sampling. Questionnaires were used to collect data from ordinary Church members, interviews for the superintendent ministers, focus group discussions for lay leaders, and documentary analysis from Synod minutes and records. Data quality was ensured by checking content, construct, criterion, bracketing, and testimonial validities. Data was analyzed thematically. Themes were generated and presented using themes categories.

3.0. Results and Discussion

The study achieved a response rate of 77% which was adequate and representative of the target sample.

Background Information of Respondents

Among the demographics sought were gender, level of education and occupation of the respondents. Out of eight superintendent ministers sampled, three were male (37.5%) and five were female (62.5%). All ministers had excellent educational backgrounds, with four (50%) of them being bachelor's degree holders, three (37.5) having master's degree, and one (12.5%) with a doctorate degree. All ministers worked on a full-time basis.

The church member's demographics details were also investigated. It was found that 110(52%) were male and 133(78%) were female. Most church members had only secondary education, comprising 201(75%) of the sample population. Others had certificate 27(7%), diploma 17(4.5%), under graduate degree 49(13%) and master's degree 1(0.3%). Marital status was also put into

consideration in this study. 200(53%) of respondents were married, 71(18%) were single, and 40(11%) were divorced.

Results on fostering the integration of Christian faith into daily living

This was the dependent variable in the study. The results indicate that the lay leaders were critical in ensuring the integration of faith in daily living. The results confirmed that lay people were in existence in all Churches.

However, the daily integration of Christian teachings and in all areas of living by the laity was found deficient. This deficiency, as agreed by the FGDs, the clergies, the lay leaders, the Church members and the documentary analysis, was anchored mainly on not following the MCK standing orders, which constitute the guide for everything that is supposed to be done in the Church by all groups (clergy and lay people). This resulted to lack of commitment, and limited monitoring, evaluation and follow-ups. The fostering of this integration suffered propagation and progress deficiency because most of the laity in the churches within Kaaga synod fails to live as per the Christian teachings beyond the 'Church walls' and 'Church gatherings'.

Results of laity in Integrating Christian Faith

The study also sought to establish the role of the laity in the integration of Christian faith into day-to-day living of MCK Kaaga synod laity. Constructs such as the extent/scope of interaction, mission and evangelism, Christian attitude, and economic and social status were considered. These constructs linked the integration of Christian faith into

day-to-day living with incarnation; that is, embodying Christian teachings and making them a lifestyle. The laity are expected to be the basis of the hub for discipleship in all local Churches (MCGuire, 2020). The research findings indicated themes such as low levels of interaction due to high levels of individualism; and personal responsibility as key in choosing to practice Christian teachings or not. Change of behavior by some Church members that were contrary to Christian teachings was pegged to personal responsibility in practicing Christian teachings received from various Church forums.

Low levels of members' interactions and individualism that led to feeble Christian attitude by members and lack of intentionality in reaching out to others even beyond the Church gatherings was another theme. These themes led to the superordinate theme that, "lack of personal initiative by many members to receive Christian teachings and deficiency of personal responsibility to practice the received Christian teachings by all on day-to-day basis led to lack of holistic embodiment of Christian teachings by many Church members

4.0. Conclusions

The study sought to analyze the role of laity in fostering integration of Christian faith into daily life in MCK Kaaga Synod. The study concludes that the laity's role in fostering integration of Christian faith into day-to-day

living was deficient due to high levels of individualism, and failure to undertake personal initiative in receiving, embedding and practicing Christian teaching in all aspects of day-to-day living.

5.0 Recommendations

This study recommends that for laity to successfully and progressively foster the integration of Christian faith into daily living, they need to strive to sustain a balance between their spiritual and social dimensions as part of their daily living. The study recommends that the Church leadership explores intentional ways of promoting both spiritual and social holiness by all believers within and outside the confines of the Church.

It is also recommends preachers incorporate social justice issues into sermons and Bible studies to encourage members to engage in activities that promote practical Christianity. The clergy need to provide guidance and support to members in their spiritual development, by demonstrating through examples how to live a life that reflects both spiritual and social holiness.

Implications of the findings

The findings of this study will be resourceful to Kaaga synod and beyond. They will add to the existing knowledge on the role of laity in Christian life, and practice; thereby promoting development of accountability teams for healthy interactions.

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