



## A HISTORY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF EAST AFRICA IN THE EASTERN REGION (1915 TO 2022)

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### Abstract

The study sought to trace the history of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) in the Eastern Region from 1915 to 2022. PCEA was introduced by the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) in 1915. It has been in the Eastern Region (Tharaka Nithi and Meru counties) for over a century now and is one of the dominant denominations in the area. However, no systematic study has been done to trace its history. The history of the Methodist Church in Kenya, the Anglican Church, and the Catholic Church in the Eastern Region is well documented, but that of PCEA in the region is conspicuously missing. This gave the authors the impetus to carry out such a study. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Data was collected and analysed from 438 respondents, including 9 presbytery moderators, 53 church ministers, and 376 church members. The study established that PCEA was brought to the Eastern Region by the CSM. The first missionaries were Africans sent from Kikuyu and Tumutumu. They were later joined by Dr Clive Irvine in 1922. A mission station was established at Chogoria, from where the church spread to other parts of the lower and upper Meru. The study concludes that PCEA is one of the dominant denominations in the Eastern Region. The study recommends that PCEA should come up with better methods of storing data to avoid losing it and preserve its heritage.

**Key terms:** Eastern Region, History, Trace, Presbyterian Church of East Africa.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) originated from the Global Scottish Presbyterian Church and was introduced to Africa by the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM). The church adopts two sacraments, baptism and Holy Communion, based on the teachings of John Calvin. It is upon these sacraments that PCEA practices its faith. PCEA is governed by a graduated system of government established as courts composed of elders and ordained ministers. The courts are the Kirk Session, Presbyteries and the General Assembly (Muita, 2003). The Presbyterian Church in Africa began in North Africa in the eighteenth century at the Egyptian port of Alexandria. PCEA came to Kenya as a private venture pioneered by directors of the Imperial British East African Company (IBEAC) in Kenya. They formed a committee in Scotland called the East African Scottish Mission. A missionary team was then recruited comprising Thomas Watson, John Grieg, John Linton and Cornelius Rahman (Macpherson, 1970). They arrived at Mombasa in 1891. They established a temporal mission station at Kibwezi with the help of Chief Kilungu, who helped them get a piece of land. However, the site proved unsuitable because it was infested with mosquitoes. Many of the missionaries died of malaria. Thomas Watson began plans of relocating the mission station, and it was moved to Baraniki in 1898, an area on a small sub ridge down the Dagoretti valley. When Dr. Homer arrived in 1899, he condemned the site because it was low-lying and posed a health risk. The mission was thus transferred to Thogoto in the same year. The place was later named Kikuyu after the people it was serving. In Thogoto, the mission constituted itself as the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM). The mission adopted a holistic approach, combining evangelisation, education, health, and industrial work.

In 1908, the CSM extended to the area across River Tana to a place on the hills of Tumutumu, where they established the second mission station. In Tumutumu, they were welcomed and assisted by Chief Rukunga, who helped them acquire land on which the mission station was built. An African by the name of Petro Mugo from Kikuyu Mission School was sent to start the mission work. He established a school which also served as a worship centre. By 1911, there were eleven boys who, including Joshua Riunga, Mageria, Kahuro, maingi, Mwema and Mathenge, among others, who were being prepared for baptism. By 1919, several congregations had been established at Nyeri, Mahiga, Magutu and Mihuti. In 1911, Dr. Philip Homer arrived in Tumutumu to start medical work.

By 1907, no Christian mission had been occupying the East and North East of Mount Kenya. The Anglicans (CMS) had been allocated the area but had failed to occupy it due to lack of funds and staff. The Methodists and Catholics had already established themselves in the upper Meru, hence the urgency of occupying the Southern Meru. The CSM were granted permission to occupy the area in 1915. Dr James Arthur, who had earlier surveyed the area together with William Tait, organised the occupation of the Chuka Mwimbi area. Three African couples were sent, including Daudi Makumi and his wife Priscilla, Samson Maingi, Naomi Njeri, Wilson Waweru and Rebecca. These couples pioneered mission work in the Eastern Region. They started at Mugui in Chuka and then relocated to lower Mwimbi at Mweria. In 1922, they were joined by Dr. Irvine, and a mission station was established at Chogoria in the upper Mwimbi. They adopted a holistic approach, blending the work of evangelisation with education, health care and industrial work. They established a mission school, a church, a medical facility and industrial work. Chogoria became the central station from where the CSM spread to Chuka, Mwimbi, Tharaka, Imenti, and upper Meru, covering the Eastern Region in Meru and Tharaka Nithi counties. The history of PCEA in the Eastern Region has not been given adequate scholarly attention. This gave impetus to trace the history of PCEA in the Eastern Region from 1915 to 2022.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The history of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa dates back to the colonial period when Kenya was still a British protectorate. PCEA was established by the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) in the late nineteenth century (Wilkinson, 1994). PCEA is attributed to the efforts of one of the earliest missionaries, Dr David Livingstone, who, while making his speech at Cambridge University, made a passionate appeal to his audience to continue with the mission work he had started in Africa (Wilkinson, 1994). In response to this appeal, the British East African Association was formed, which later became the Imperial British East Africa (IBEA) Company and was granted the royal Charter of Queen Victoria. The company was also granted administrative and trading rights in the East African area. The directors of the company were members of the Free Church of Scotland. They were Sir William Mackinnon and Alexander Bruce. They conceived the idea of a mission in East Africa and founded the East African Scottish Mission. The first missionaries who included Dr Stewart, Dr Robert Unwin Moffat, Thomas Watson, John Linton, John Grieg and Cornelius Rahman, arrived in Mombasa in 1891 (Macpherson, 1970). They established a temporal station at Kibwezi through the help of Chief Kilungu. However, the mission station was moved to Baraniki near Dagorreti due to health issues that led to the death of some of the missionaries. In 1898, the station was moved again to Thogoto, which later became Kikuyu after the people it served. In Kikuyu, the EASM constituted themselves as the Church of Scotland Mission. In Kikuyu, the missionaries adopted a holistic approach, blending the work of evangelisation with education, healthcare, and industrial work. In 1908, another station was started in Tumutumu across the River Tana. They followed the same pattern, establishing a church, a school, and a medical facility (Muita, 2003).

The idea of mission work in the Eastern Region was initiated in 1913 by Dr. J. Arthur and William Tait from Kikuyu. In September 1913, he talked to the CMS (Anglican), which had been allocated the area on the Eastern slopes of Mt. Kenya but had not occupied it due to financial constraints and shortage of staff and was granted permission by the Protectorate Government to open a mission station there. The following month, he and Tait visited the area and found it favourable for mission work. In 1915, Daudi Makumi and his wife Priscilla and Samsoni Maingi from Tumutumu and his wife Naomi and Wilson Waweru and his wife Rebecca. The three couples came to Mweria in Chief Gaitungi's location in the lower Mwimbi and opened a mission station there. Hence, the Africans began mission work by the PCEA in Meru. They built a church and the first school in the area and began educational, evangelistic and medical work (Mbaabu, 1987). The three families worked at Chuka-Mwimbi without any Scottish Missionaries (Muita, 2003). In 1921, arrangements were made to post the first European missionary to Chuka-Mwimbi, and in October 1922, Dr. A. Clive Irvine arrived at Chogoria. It is from Chogoria that the Presbyterian Church of East Africa spread to other parts of the Eastern Region. PCEA has been in the Eastern region for more than a century now and has spread to various parts of the Tharaka Nithi and Meru counties. However, the history of PCEA in the Eastern region has not been given in any systematic study, hence the need for the current study.

## 3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Descriptive survey is a method of collecting data by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) posit that a descriptive survey research design is viable when analysing social issues in communities. Descriptive design is useful in collecting information about peoples' attitudes, opinions and habits on social issues. Questionnaires, oral interviews and document reviews were used to collect the data. The target population was 60,862 members of PCEA found in the Eastern Region. The sample size for this study

was 438, which included 9 presbytery moderators, 53 church ministers and 376 church members. From the 376 church members, a category of 20 respondents who were identified through snowballing were engaged in oral interviews. The presbytery moderators were purposively sampled; church ministers were identified through stratified sampling, while the church members were randomly sampled. The study was carried out in the Eastern Region, which covers Tharaka Nithi and Meru counties. Eastern Region covers the area from River Thuchi on the boundary of Tharaka Nithi and Embu counties, covering the whole of Igembe, Tigania, Igoji, Mwimbi, Muthambi, Chuka and initially going all the way to Isiolo, Marsabit and Moyale.

## 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The religion of the Meru People before the Coming of the Missionaries

The people of Meru believed in God, whom they called Murungu, and who was entrenched in all their cultural and traditional practices. God is their creator and father, and they refer to Him as *baaba wetu* since he was the origin of the first family of Mukunga and Ngaa. Though invisible, he provided for and watched over his people while they lived among them. He revealed Himself to them and instructed them on how to worship him (Bernard, 1989). God was omnipresent (*murungu wa kunthe*) who lived in shrines on mountains like Mt. Kenya, Nyambene, and any big mountain. He had shrines under the evergreen trees like the Mugumo tree. They described their God as omnipotent (*mwene inya*), all-knowing (*Murungu wa umenyo*), immanent (*baaba wetu*), transcendent (*Gitije*) and eternal God (*Murungu wa ntuire*) who is loving, holy, just, merciful and a good God. The Meru people believe that God separated from them after evil in the form of a wise crawling creature, a snake known as *mugambi*, approached the first family and convinced them to eat the fruits of the tree in the garden. This annoyed God, and hence He went away. However, the Meru believe that although God is far, he still listens to them and hears them when they pray (Gitari, 2006).

Religion was part of the Meru people. Individual knowledge about God was inborn (Gitari, 2006). The head of the family, whether extended or nuclear, led the members in the worship of God. He was also expected to teach them about God. This was done orally and perfected through constant practice (Gehman, 1990). Since God (Murungu) created the first family, the people of Meru are connected to God and their religion through the social unit. Meru was a patriarchal community since they believed God was a male ancestor from whom they descended (Bernard, 1990). The community practised rites of passage, which helped to bind the people together. These included naming, circumcision and marriage.

The religion of the Meru people spelt out the morals and ethics of the society. It offered solutions to moral and ethical problems in the society. Every age group had its own norms, which they were expected to observe without failure. Breaking any of these rules led to punishment by the other members of that particular group. The rules were in the nuclear, extended, larger families, clans and in the Njuri Ncheke (Gitari, 2006).

The Meru people had a category of religious specialists. These included the prophets (*iroria*), the diviners, mediums, sorcerers, witches and magicians. The Meru people feared two of these categories. The sorcerers (*murogi wa ithitu*), the magicians (*Murogi wa ciama*), and the witch doctors (*muga* or *muntu mugo*). These were the enemies of the people and were associated with all the misfortune that befell the community. They worked against society, and their targets were often the children, the young and the old people

(Bernard, 1990). The work of the diviner was divination, also known as *Kuringia Mbugu*, so as to reveal the cause of sickness or misfortune and then communicate to the medicine man the kind of treatment that was needed. The medicine man was an herbalist who used herbs to treat the sick and also helped those affected by witchcraft. Prophet (Kiroria) used to foretell the future.

## The Missionary Era

The Europeans arrived in Meru towards the end of the nineteenth century as part of Arab trading caravans, and the region was designated an administrative District of the British colonial government in 1910 (Dolan, 2002). Christian missionaries closely followed and brought Christianity. These included the United Methodist Free Church, which opened its first station at Kaaga in 1912 through the works of Dr. Irvine. Worthington, who was assisted by Daudi Ituma (Nthamburi, 1982). The Consolata Fathers started the Catholic Church in Meru at Mujwa in Imenti and at Kariakomo in Mwimbi, Tigania and Amung'enti. The Anglican Church of Kenya was established in Meru in 1969 by the Anglicans from Kigari in Embu (Nkonge, 2016).

PCEA was introduced in the Eastern Region by the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM). The other churches found in Meru include the Pentecostals, African-instituted churches (Independent Churches), and New religious movements, which have spread at a very high rate. The first group of Christians in Chuka were individual Christians who had come to work at the administration post as clerks, messengers, cooks and policemen. However, they were not sent by any mission society and, therefore, did not establish a formal mission station. The Assistant District Commissioner had given them a tent where they used to hold prayers (Nkoroi, OI, 2024).

The granting of the Royal Charter to the Imperial British East Africa Company had a direct influence on how the missions expanded their activities (Nthamburi, 1982). When the colonial masters partitioned Africa into spheres of influence, the Overseas Board of Missionary Enterprise (OBME) also partitioned Kenya for different Enterprises with different spheres of influence. The lower Meru from River Kithino, which is the area covering Meru South, Chuka and Mwimbi, were part of Embu, hence a sphere of influence of CMS. By 1914, CMS had established itself at Kabare and Kigari but delayed occupying the Chuka Mwimbi area in the North due to lack of funds and staff and the hostility of the Chuka people. Things got better with the creation of a new administrative unit at Chuka known as Fort Naka.

The establishment of PCEA in the Eastern Region was through the efforts of Dr. James Arthur of the CSM from Kikuyu Murigu (OI, 2022). He applied to the Overseas Board of Missionary Enterprise to be allowed to start a mission in the southern part of lower Meru. In October 1913, Dr. Arthur, together with William Tait, did a survey at Nkuthika in Chuka, which was the home of the paramount chief Kabandango (Mutegi, OI, 2023). They wanted to establish a mission station here due to the security provided by the chief's guards. Later, they moved north and settled for Kiereni, which was near Fort Naka, because there was clean water available from the nearby River Naka and security from the government guards. DR Arthur also identified Kambandi, which was under Chief Kangangi, and Mwimbi, under Chief Gaitungi, as possible sites. The Mwimbi site was deemed ideal because it had enough water, the climate was favourable, and there were no mosquitoes. As Dr. Arthur and his companions chose the site for the mission, they were influenced by the presence of the Roman Catholics at Igoji and Embu. The Mwimbi site would keep the Roman Catholics

at Igoji away from Chuka- Mwimbi while the Chuka site would keep RCC at Embu away (Mbaabu, OI, 2024).

Permission to start the mission among the Chuka-Mwimbi was granted in 1915 (Kikuyu News, 1915). The place between River Kithino and Thuchi River was handed over to the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) to start missionary work and also as a sphere of influence. Dr Arthur also applied to the Free Church of Scotland for sponsorship to build a mission station in this newfound zone of Chuka-Mwimbi and Meru South. According to Wilkinson (1994), the first attempt to establish a mission station was not successful due to the hostility of the Chuka people. The Chuka people developed a negative attitude towards strangers due to the constant attacks from the Aembu, Amwimbi, and Akamba. Generally, the Chuka people had developed a phobia of the white man and were very suspicious of any stranger in their land (Mbae, OI, 2024).

In 1915, a group of African Missionaries, who included Daudi Makumi and his wife Priscilla, Wilson Waweru and his wife Rebecca and Samson Maingi and his wife Naomi, were sent from Tumutumu and Kikuyu Missions Stations. All of them were skilled in Christian Evangelism, modern medicine, education, farming and housing. They were also fluent in English, Kiswahili, and Kikuyu, and they pioneered missionary work in Chuka-Mwimbi. The first stop was in lower Mwimbi, where they were met by Chief Gaitungi. He offered them land and mobilised labour to build a temporal classroom that served as a church and school at Mweria. According to Nkoroi (2024), the system of the missionaries was that of building one structure which would serve as a classroom and a church.

As the three couples were trying to establish themselves in the lower Mwimbi, there was a severe drought that resulted in a famine. The evangelists kept on going back to their homes for food supplies. The mission work was also affected by the First World War, which led to the closure due to a shortage of administrative staff (Kabii, OI, 2023). This led to the return of all the missionaries and the evangelists back to Kikuyu and Tumutumu.

After the war, in 1919, the question of further development of the Chuka-Mwimbi station was revived. The mission council made a budget for the development. The three couples visited the upper part of Mwimbi in 1920. Chief Mbogori M' Mwenda was willing to settle the visitors and offer security for the mission station. The people were welcoming, and the chief went to meet them at Fort Embu. He also accommodated them at Mutindwa (Murigu, OI, 2022). The Africans were the pioneer missionaries in the Eastern Region. They were also assisted by evangelists from Kikuyu and Tumutumu. These included Willie Kanini, who was sent in 1918 to assist Daudi Makumi in Mwimbi; Ismael Wango who was posted to work in Kanyue in 1921; Harrison Kariuki and his wife Njeri were posted to work in Chuka in 1920; Joshua Matenjo who worked in Kanyue, Jonathan Kinuthia worked in Chuka in 1920, Jackson Mwariama and Paul Mugo who were sent to Kanyue in 1922. The first trained evangelist from Chuka-Mwimbi was Robinson M' Nkiria from Kanyue. The African evangelists laid a strong foundation for the future development of Christianity in the Chuka Mwimbi area of the Eastern Region (Mbae, OI, 2024, Mwiandi, 1993).

After the First World War, Dr. Irvine was posted to Thogoto as a medical doctor. In 1920, Dr. Irvine was sent to survey the new area where the mission station would be established. He visited Nkuthika, which was located in Central Karingani, Chuka. He met Chief M'Rugamba, who was also known as Kabayia,

requesting to be allocated land to start the mission station. The chief turned down the request for fear that if he allowed the white man to settle in the area, the local people would lose their land (Mutegi, OI, 2023). Dr. Irvine then turned northwards and identified a place in Upper Mwimbi on the foothills of Makuri Hills. He then left the country for Scotland but with the promise that he would come back and start the mission centre (Mbaka, OI, 2024).

Dr. Irvine returned with his family and arrived at Chogoria in 1922. He was welcomed by Daudi Makumi, one of the first African evangelists, together with Chief Mbogori (Kabii, OI, 2023). That evening, many people came to see the white man who had come to live among them in Chogoria. On this night, Dr. Irvine held prayers in his house with these people, and this became the foundation of the church at Chogoria (Mbaka, OI, 2024).

He was welcomed to Chogoria, and some locals gave him land to start the mission station. These included Kathuri M'Njagi, Baranya Kioja, Mucheke M'Rugunu, Mwirichia Kirungi and Itimitu Kathiori. Chief Mbogori was very useful at the start of the mission. He would offer men the labour needed in the establishment of the mission (Mbae, OI, 2024). Dr. Irvine was assisted in starting off the building of the mission station by Africans, who included carpenters and masons such as Ayub Mugo and Kobia Gaitungi, who had been trained at Thogoto. Paul Mugo supervised the building of the structures at Chogoria. In many instances, the chiefs in Mwimbi forced their people to offer labour in the mission station. In the process of building the structures to host the mission station, poles were cut from the nearby Chogoria forest by men while their wives brought grass to the roof and dry ferns for the walls. Chief Mbogori, though not yet converted to the new faith, allowed his wives and daughters to assist in carrying the thatch (Mbae, OI, 2024).

The first achievement of Dr. Irvine was developing the medical work which he did during his first year at Chogoria. Immediately after settling in Chogoria, he started industrial work, which was boosted by the power he generated from the falls at River Kamara. He also installed a sawmill, which helped in providing timber for the construction of the mission buildings (Mbaabu, OI, 2024).

By 1923, he had built a small church, and regular church services and instruction classes were ongoing. He also organised village visits in the surrounding area, taking the gospel message outside the mission station. This led to the conversion of the Africans to the new faith, and in 1924, the first baptisms were conducted. Those baptised included Ayub, Filipo, Gerishon, Jonathan, Maina, Willie and Musa; one woman by the name Marion wa Musa and five children were conducted (Wilkinson, 1994). In 1923, an outstation was opened at Kiamuchumbi village by Dr. Irvine, where he started a church and a school called Tungu, named after the biggest river nearby. The earliest converts were Musa M' Bundi, Johnstone Kiambati, Johana M' Ntiba, Stanley Ruthiri and Jackson M, Mukiria, Shadrack Ngajiu, M'Nchiri, Samuel Mbatau, Ibrahim Ikubia, Muchara M'Ithara, Jusufu Mung'ori and Zacharia M'Ikija. However, due to the inaccessibility of the area, the outstation was moved to Minugu in 1926 (Mbaka, 2024).

In the year 1925, Dr. Irvine revisited Chuka, a place called Ndiruni, with plans to start an outstation. Unfortunately, he did not get support from the people, so he crossed over to Kiereni. At Kiereni, he was welcomed by M'Muga Kabaruru, who was by then the sub-area (Sub-area was a leader of a small area, often a village working under a sub-chief) together with Njue Kaana, Njeru Kamwiri and M'Murwa. The four donated a piece of land on which Dr. Irvine established a church, school and dispensary (Mutegi, OI, 2023).

In 1928, Dr. Irvine started an outstation at Kambu in Muthambi where some of the first scholars and converts included Gideon M'Thuura, Reuben Muketha and Amos Mwiandi, among others (Mbaka, OI, 2024). Through the efforts of Dr. Irvine, CSM spread to other areas in the Chuka-Mwimbi area. He would travel to various places accompanied by the elders who had been ordained, including Musa M'Mugo, John Njeru and Ephantus, commonly referred to as "Ephanto". Among the congregations that were started through the efforts of Dr. Irvine include Kajjuduthi in 1923, Kiereni in 1925, Ngeru in 1928, Kithangari 1930, Kanyakine in 1932, Gikurune in 1933, Mukuuni in 1936, Ithimbari in 1937 and Kajjampau in 1943. When he was not available to visit these places, he would prepare sermons and give them to the African evangelists who read them to the congregations. At this time, he was assisted by a freelance evangelist named Mwangi wa Nyariri from Kiambu, together with Gerishon Mukangu and Silas Muchiri. According to Nkoroi (OI, 2024), after establishing the congregations, he would also visit them regularly to preach and give Holy Communion.

In 1926, Jeremiah Waita was posted to Chogoria from Kikuyu as the first minister and was replaced by Solomon Ndambi. The first deacon court was established in Chogoria in 1928, and a church committee was constituted to oversee the church matters. In 1931, the Presbytery of Kenya of the Church of Scotland approved the formation of the Chogoria Kirk Session, and in the following year (1932), Dr. Arthur ordained four elders. These were Gerishon Mukangu, Jonathan Murithi, Musa M'Muga and Willie Kanini. In 1936, Daudi M'Riara, Jason, Joseph Gathiga, Paulo and Phares Mutonga were also ordained. This led to the constitution of the first Kirk Session in Chogoria under the Presbytery of Kenya.

In 1934, a congregation was planted at Njuri by Daudi M' Raria, Amos Muchara and Abednego Muchiri. They were assisted by the Chief Magite of Magumoni Location to put up a shed that was used as a prayer house and a school. The first converts were Gerald Ibere, Danson Karuku, M' Rintatua, Ephantus Murangiri, Mbiuki Rwanda, John Kaunga Njoka Njuki, Eugenio Mwenje, Nkari Magiti, Murua Njeru, Eldad Muthungu and Stephano Magiri. In 1942, more members joined the CSM, and the message spread to the areas of Muthara, Kiamuriuki, Thuita, Kathatwa, Kigogo and Mugaani, all in the Magumoni location Chuka area.

In 1936, PCEA was started at Mukuuni in Chuka by Dr. Irvine with the assistance of Samuel Namu. Samuel Namu identified a site for the construction of the church at Mariani near the current Mukuuni High School. The site had originally been a forest where the elders burnt offerings. The first church made of wood and grass, commonly known as "Kanitha wa mithara", was built and served as a church, school and dispensary (Kamau, OI, 2024). The first converts included Zablon Njuki, Paul Bururia, Samuel Namu, Ayub Mutara and Justus Thiuru, among others. Erastus Ruth M'Garu, Mariamu Ndago and Judith Naaman were among the first women converts. According to Nkoroi (OI, 2024), Mwalimu Mariamu Ndago wa Samueli played a key role in the conversion of Africans. In 1937, the CSM started an outstation at Gatua at a place called Kathituni (Ruguta). The pioneers who started the congregation were Jediel Muindi Kwinga and Samuel Mbatau, a shamba boy at Chogoria Mission Hospital. By 1939, there were 15 bush congregations throughout the Chogoria area. These included Kiangua, Gikurune, Kanyakine, Kithangari, Mutinndwa, Chogoria, Kiraro and Kirindini. Regular Sunday services were held every Sunday under the leadership of the elders. The church ministers from Chogoria visited them occasionally.

Another key personality in the history of PCEA in the Eastern Region was Jerusha Kanyua. According to



Nyamu (O I, 2022), Jerusha, her husband Paul Njeru, Josto Kanampiu, and Bertha Kangai were the first converts to Christianity, having received the message from Ayub Mugo Njuki, who was the first convert from Ndagani. Ayub was recruited to Christianity by Mr Carr, who took him from Ndagani to Chogoria and converted him to the new religion. The work of establishing PCEA in the Chuka-Mwimbi area was mainly the work of the teacher evangelists who included Jediel Ngara, Amos Magati, Silas Njoka and Abednego Muchiri, Elias Mukunga, Amos M'Ragwa and Stanley Nkuma from Gituntu.

Among the Mbeere people who live in the Igambang'ombe Zone of Tharaka Nithi County, the message was taken there by a joint venture of the CMS and the CSM. In 1926, Fredrick Kamumo Miiru, who had converted to Christianity during his youthful days while working in the European coffee estates in Thika, introduced the Mbeere people to Christianity. He built a prayer house and school at a place known as Kamweru with the help of Reverend John Comely of the CMS. In 1935, the colonial government established a boundary along River Thuchi to separate Embu and Meru. Therefore, The CMS transferred the school and church at Kamweru to the CSM under Dr. Irvine. Due to communication challenges, the school and church were later moved to Kamwimbi. The first congregation was opened, and the pioneer members included Njeru Mwatha, Julius Kibugi, Charles Gichoni, Priscilla Utuku, Edith Mwonge, Njeru Mbatuna and Samuel Njiru. From here, the PCEA spread to other areas, leading to the opening of six other congregations at Kiaritha, Itugururu, Igamatundu, Gachiegoki, Kambiti and Ishiara (Kamau, OI, 2024).

PCEA in Tharaka began with the desire for a school where children could learn and help their parents read documents. The council of elders (Akuru ba Njuri) pioneered the idea of a school. Nta Ngoci, Kinunkui, and Nta Raria, accompanied by the chief, approached Dr. Irvine with a request to start a school in their area. Dr. Irvine granted the request. A piece of land was donated by the Kanjogu Mbao clan, Nta Mukiira, Nta Rindiri, Nta Rinkanya, Phineas Maguta and Joses Kathendu, among others. Chief Jothan and his assistant Chief Kiraithe constructed a classroom and a residential house for the teacher. As the teachers arrived, evangelists and catechists also came, and the establishment of PCEA in Tharaka began. The teachers served as evangelists and catechists, while the classroom served as a church. They carried out a lot of evangelism among the learners, their parents and the community in general (Kabii, 2023).

By 1946, the congregations in Chuka Mwimbi had grown to 28, which included Kiang'ondu, Kathigiri, Gatuntuni, Ikuu, Mukui, Lower Chure and Yururu. For easy administration, Chogoria area was divided into three areas in 1947. Chuka area, which was now under Silas Muchina; Meru South, which was under Willie Kanini; and Mwimbi area, under Phares Mutonga as the evangelists. By 1950, the congregations had grown to about 30 with the addition of Weru and Kieni and a membership of about 2000. In 1952, Chuka Parish and Kirk Session were constituted by the Tumutumu Presbytery. The first parish minister was Geoffrey Ngari. Thus, the Kirk sessions had grown to two. In 1953, the South Meru Kirk Session was inaugurated with its headquarters at Kanyakine under the Reverend Linus Waruiru. In the same year, Chogoria Presbytery was constituted, and Dr. Irvine was appointed the first moderator (Kathuni, OI, 2024; Nkoroi, OI, 2024; Mutegi, OI, 2023).

## **Development of Medical work in the Eastern Region**

The CSM gave a holistic approach to the work of evangelisation. This meant combining evangelism, education, medical and industrial work. When the Foreign Mission Committee allowed the CSM to start missionary work in the Chuka-Mwimbi area in 1915, the condition was that they develop it on medical

lines. Initial plans were to establish the medical work in Chuka at Kiereni. Unfortunately, when Dr. Irvine visited the area with the offer, the Chuka people resisted and were not willing to offer their land for the construction of the hospital. Therefore, the CSM opted to go back to Chogoria in the upper Mwimbi, where medical work was established (Nkoroi, OI, 2024).

Dr. Irvine started medical work in 1923 after putting up a dispensary made of wattle and mud walls. At first, the Africans were sceptical of the white man's treatment, but later, they embraced it, influenced by a few who had witnessed the white man's magic of healing at Kikuyu and Tumutumu. The first major success of Dr. Irvine was providing a cure for yaws, a disease that had been ailing the people of Meru for many years. He also established a small home for leprosy patients down the valley of River Kamara in a village called Gatheru. Dr. Irvine worked tirelessly to develop the medical work at Chogoria, and by 1924, the hospital attracted patients from as far as across river Tana among the Akamba people (Kabii, 2023). The medical work started by offering outpatient services, but by 1927, admissions had started. Dr. Irvine was assisted in developing medical work by Samson Maingi, Suleiman Nanju and Paulo Wahoro, who had been trained at Tumutumu by Dr. Philip. He also trained other Africans, including Jason, Henry Justo, Jusufu, Mariko, Jemima and Damaris. In 1927, Dr. Janet Welch was posted from Tumutumu to help with the medical work in Chogoria. In order to reach out to the people, Dr. Irvine opened dispensaries at Mukuuni and Weru in 1936. By 1949, each school had a dispensary staffed with one male dresser. Dr. Irvine would visit these places on Wednesdays accompanied by staff from the hospital. In 1948, he was joined by his son, Dr. Kenneth Irvine, who had graduated as a medical doctor before he left for Maua Methodist Hospital. In 1953, he was joined by his second son, Geoffrey, who had also studied medicine. Dr. Irvine was also instrumental in establishing a medical training school, the current Clive Irvine medical training school. He retired from Chogoria in 1961 and went to live in Nairobi (Mbaabu, 2024).

## Development of Education

The African evangelist laid the foundation for education in the Eastern Region. They started the first school at Mugui in Chuka, which was later relocated to Mweria in Mwimbi in 1916 because the Chuka people had shown little interest in education. In 1919, Robinson M'Nkoria and Ernest Irambu registered as pupils at the school in Kanyue. The school had few students because many were attracted to Igoji, where the Roman Catholics had already been established. The Catholics were more flexible than the CSM; hence, they attracted more pupils. The school was often closed due to lack of pupils. Among the Chuka, the first pupils were the social misfits (imaramari), the poor and the orphaned. Daudi Makumi and Willie Kanini played a crucial role in the development of education. They walked from village to village, encouraging parents to enrol their children in school (Mutegi, 2023).

Teacher evangelists played a major role in the development of education in the Eastern Region. By 1919, the number of students had increased. This was due to the presence of more evangelists in the area. The teacher evangelists included Makumi, Joshua Matenjwa, Ishmael Wango, Paul Mugo, Harrison Kariuki, Njeri, Kariuki Jonathan Kinuthia and Jackson Muriama. This meant that the evangelist had more contact with the people than before. The African missionaries worked alone, and by the time the white missionaries arrived, schools were already established, and learning was taking place (Mwiandi, 1993)

After the arrival of Dr. Clive Irvine at Chogoria in 1922, he built a workshop and industry where he started a rudimentary school (Dr. Irvine, 1922). Technical classes were started, and the first teacher was Mr. Maina

from Tumutumu. He was later replaced by Ayub Nguyai (Wilkinson, 1994). Schools were used as centres of evangelisation, and therefore, religious education was emphasised, although subjects like mathematics, agriculture and industrial work were offered. In 1923, Dr. Irvine started Chogoria Boys Mission School. The first pupils were Samson Kinegeni, Musa M'Ibere, Shandrack Kaugi, Suleiman Nancu, Petro Ruita, William M'Njau, Nathaniel M'Mindi, Ernest M'Irambu, and Silas Karugi. Naaman Mugwika, Ezekiel Ngentu and Musa M'Muga. After establishing the mission school, Dr. Irvine left the work of teaching to the African teachers while he concentrated on the medical work. Daudi Makumi became the coordinator of the other teachers. Chogoria was the central station and provided supervision and set standards for the village schools. In 1924, Chogoria Mission started training its teachers (Wilkinson, 1994). The CSM quickly opened a school at Ndiruni, assisted by Chief Magiti, and Willie Kanini was posted to start the school. The first students included Joel M' Ikingi, Haruni Ndegwa, Nyaga Gakuri, Daniel Kagondu, Abednego Muchiri and Mwirichia Gakuru. By 1929, there were fifteen outstation schools which were in Kiereni, Mukuuni, Weru, Tungu, Ngeru, Kirindini, Ithimbari, Kanyakine, Kajiunduthi, Nkuthika, Njuri, Gituntu, Igoji, Gakuuni and Egangara (PCEA, 2022). According to Kamau (OI, 2024), in 1934, through the efforts of Abednego Muchiri, a school was built at Kibugua. This is the current Njuri primary school. In the same year, Kiereni, Kiacheu in Muthambi, Nkumbo, Kiraro, Kiriani and Kiangua were built. By 1939 CSM had established schools in Kanyue, Kambandi, Mukuuni, Ndagani, Kiereni, Nkuthika, Itiri, Kimuchia, Chogoria, Kithangani, Katharaka, Gantaraki, Chogoria, Gikurune, Kanyakine, Kirindine, Kionyo, Kajiunduthi, Miutine, Kibugua, Ngeru, Kiraro and Kiriani (Mbae, OI, 2024). By 1951, the CSM had 33 schools. After independence, the management of the schools was given to the Meru district, and later, the government took over. The role of the church was that of a sponsor.

## Post Missionary Era

The post-missionary era was marked by the spread of PCEA to areas beyond the Chuka-Mwimbi to the upper part of Meru. The United Methodist Free Mission was already settled here, and they had established the Methodist Church in Kenya. The Catholics had also been started by 1911, and by 1912, they had opened new stations in Meru North (Nkonge, 2009). The birth of PCEA in the upper Meru is attributed to a few learned individuals from Chuka-Mwimbi and other areas where PCEA had been established. These were government officers who were working in various departments. Their desire to continue worshipping in the PCEA led them to come together and start the church. They were led by Mr. Jotham Imwara, who helped identify six families that pioneered PCEA in the upper Meru. The six families included Godfrey Kaburu Muketha and family, Silas Maina and family, Johnstone Nderitu Mwondia and family, Wallace Kibaara and family, Mr Mwaura and family and himself, Jotham Njue Imwara. The six started holding house-to-house fellowships. Later, they started carrying out door-to-door evangelism, and with time, they started holding Sunday services in the members' houses (Imwara, OI, 2022). In 1979, through the assistance of Wallace Kibaara, who was a deputy town clerk with the County Council of Meru and a member of the PCEA, they were able to get a small room at Kinoru showground, which served as their place of worship. From here, they were able to build a semi-permanent prayer house (Imwara, OI, 2022). It was not until 1994 that they were able to buy a plot through the help of Mutuma Mwenda, who was a town clerk and the son of a late powerful Cabinet Minister, Jackson Angaine. A plot was bought at Mwendantu, and the current PCEA Meru town church was built.

Other congregations were opened at different places. In 1979, a congregation was opened at Nkabune, pioneered by Michael M. Ringera. He approached two of his brothers, Gatobu and M' Thirari, who agreed

to sell a piece of land. Together with Zipporah Gikanda, the families of M'Thirari, John Murugu, and Francis Mwiti started a PCEA congregation at Nkabune.

PCEA started at Gaitu in April 1979 in the garden of Mzee Kirera. The pioneer members were from the RCC who had left the church after disagreeing with the Catholic Bishop on the doctrine of salvation. A group of about ten included Bernard Kirera, Patrick Ngurwe, Michael Muriungi, Peter Thurania, Jevenali Kibunja, Gabriel Mungiriria, Paul Kaaria, Samson Mwoga, Edward Mwobobia, Maria Cornelio and Sebelina Joani declared that they were saved in 1973. The Catholic Bishop denounced the doctrine of salvation, and thus, these members left the church and searched for a church that accepted the doctrine of salvation. Thus, they chose PCEA. In 1979, they united and joined PCEA and planted the first congregation at Kiamigwi with the help of Elder Joseph M'Baruga from PCEA Mwichiune. From here, other congregations were planted at Mweru, Njuthine and Kiagu in 1979, Mbajone in 1981, Nkandone in 1983, Ruchoro in 1985, Gikuuru in 1988, Njotamu, Equator and Kimate in 1990.

In 1984, another congregation was started at Ruanguene with the help of Elder Godfrey Kaburu Muketha from PCEA Meru Town. Mr. Kaburu and his wife, Tabitha Gacheri, with the assistance of Reverend Leonard Mburugu, helped to establish PCEA Ruanguene. In 1987, another congregation was opened at Nthimbiri. The pioneer founders were David M'Anampiu, who had defected from the Methodist Church, and Melchizedek M'Mugambi, formerly of the National Independent Church of Africa (NICA). Makirone congregation was planted in 1996 and hosted at the home of Melchizedek M'Mugambi and later secured a plot from Charles Kirigia on which the church was built (Imwara, OI, 2022).

In 1999, a congregation was established at Ruiru by a group of Christians who had defected from the Methodist Church. This group was led by Philip M'Tuerandu. With permission from the Meru Outreach, they started worshipping at Philip's home, and later, they bought a piece of land from John Muthuri on which the church was built. The pioneer members were Philip M'Tuerandu and his family, James Kinoti, Stephen and his wife Rose Kinya, Cathrine Kanario, Robert Mutuana, Doris Kaaria and among others (Murigu, 2022).

In 2008, a congregation was started at Gitoro. This was started by members of PCEA Meru Town Church (Mwendantu), who felt the need to start a congregation near their place of residence to avoid the long distance to Mwendantu. The church was built at Kinoro Primary School. Godfrey Kaburu, Bretta Njeru, Jackson Murithi and David Wanjohi were the pioneer leaders in the new congregation (Imwara, 2022).

In Maua, PCEA started on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1985 at Nkanda (Ruongo) in Igembe Sub County. PCEA was founded here through the efforts of Mr Wilson Ntoitha and Mr Ayub Mutiga amid challenges posed by the already existing churches, mainly the MCK and RCC in the area, inadequate finances and water shortage. However, through works of evangelism, pastoral visits, conventions, retreats and open-air meetings, the church has experienced spiritual and physical growth, and in 1988, it was upgraded into a Nendeni area with three congregations already in place, which included Nkanda, Maua and Kanjoo. In 2016, Maua Parish was inaugurated, and currently, there are 13 congregations, which include Maua Town church, Kiengu, Laare, Kimutubua, Njia, Athiru, Nkanda, Gituampio, Kimeyu, KK Ebenezer, Kanjoo, Kiutine and Makorono PCEA church (Kariuki, 2022).

In Isiolo, PCEA was started through the efforts of Godfrey Kariuki, who worked as a Public health officer. Together with Phyllis Itheru, Nicholas Wachira, Samson Mwangi, John Ntiba, Japhet Kimathi, Dickson Wangai, Gladys Nyaga, who was the wife to the officer in charge of Lands, Lucy, who was a teacher, Madam Dickson, Mama Githaiga, Mama Mwangi and Mrs Ruthuthi. Through the coordination of Mr Kariuki, they started assembling at Wabera Primary School for Sunday services. They were assisted by Rev Njoroge from Meru town. With time, the membership grew, and in 1983, Isiolo was declared a Nendeni area under Rev Njoroge. The worship centre was later moved from Wabera Primary School to Isiolo Boys amidst resistance from the Muslims. This was made possible because the principal at the time, Mr. Wamae, was a Presbyterian (Kariuki, OI, 2022). Later in the year, Rev Gitau was posted to Isiolo, now a Nendeni area, and manned the church without any elders until late 1983, when Kariuki was ordained as the first elder. The membership started with 22 members, but with time, the number grew to approximately 50. In 1985, a new prayer house was opened at the Anti-Poaching Unit with the aim of attracting the Samburus to PCEA. After establishing themselves here, the church started by assisting the Samburus by teaching them new methods of farming, which proved more productive, and also introduced education to the pastoralist community. Their children were not enrolled on any school, and when PCEA introduced formal education to them, it really attracted them to the new faith. According to Kariuki (OI, 2022), one boy from the Samburu community managed to complete Form Four and was later employed by the national government in the District Commissioner's office. He later married Esther, who was an active member of the Woman's Guild and worked as a court interpreter. This motivated many to join PCEA, especially those working with the national government and the local Samburu community (Kathuni, OI, 2024).

A third prayer house was opened at Mutunyi, and this time, it was in somebody's house. Later, a lady by the name of Mama Mbogo donated a site for the construction of the prayer house. The membership in the PCEA had now grown to about sixty, and therefore, the church employed a full-time evangelist to assist the Reverend Gitau in manning the prayer houses. In 1985, another prayer house was opened at KK under a tree. This attracted members from Tigania, especially the youth and those who had gone to school. The Church membership had now grown to 150, and other congregations were opened, which included PCEA Faith church, PCEA Matunda Church, PCEA Mchungaji Mwema and PCEA Muerera wa Maria towards Maua, in 1987, three more elders were Japheth Kimathi. Wilfred Wanjohi and John Ntiba were ordained. At the same time, Rebecca Nyaguthii was appointed to serve as a deaconess.

In 1989, the mission extended from Isiolo to Marsabit and then Moyale. This was boosted by the youth in the Eastern Region under the leadership of the late Francis Ngigi Gatua, who was the youth coordinator, together with other youth leaders who included the late Emily Kanyaru and late Cecilia Nkari and Geoffrey Mbaabu as their Chairman, organised a mission trip to Isiolo, Marsabit and Moyale where they preached the gospel and converted many. They set the first prayer house at Buri Halo. The new converts were mainly the Borans. Because the place was in the interior, the youth employed a permanent evangelist by the name of Galgalo to assist in shepherding the new converts. In Marsabit, it was not easy to get a plot to build a permanent prayer house due to the presence of the Muslims, but recently, the Nyeri Presbytery managed to buy a plot for the construction of a church. The Mission in Marsabit and Isiolo is still ongoing (Kirimu, OI, 2023).

For easy management of the church, new administrative boundaries were established. In 1978, South Meru Parish was divided into three parts, giving rise to the Egoji, Kanyakine, and Ngirine Parishes. The Presbytery

of Imenti was created with its headquarters at Kanyakine (Imwara, OI, 2022). The whole area was under the jurisdiction of three Presbyteries of Chuka, Chogoria and Imenti. Chuka Presbytery extended from Thuchi to River Tungu, Chogoria extending from Tungu to Mutonga, both located in Tharaka Nithi County, while Imenti Presbytery extended from Mutonga River to Meru, Nyambene, Isiolo and Marsabit Districts.

In 1988, Chuka Parish was divided into three parts, which led to the constitution of Magumoni, Kiereni, and Ndagani Parish (Nkoroi, O I, 2022). In the same year, Chuka Presbytery was created, with its headquarters at Njuri. In 2005, Chogoria Presbytery was subdivided into Chogoria North, Chogoria South and Chogoria Central Presbyteries. In the same year, Imenti Presbytery was subdivided into three: Imenti North, Imenti Central and Imenti South and Chuka Presbytery was divided into two, Chuka and Magumoni Presbyteries, thus giving rise to the nine presbyteries that formed the Eastern Region (PCEA, 2022). The Eastern Region is now made up of 9 Presbyteries, which are divided into 45 parishes and 310 congregations and a population of about 60,862 members of the PCEA. The area of Isiolo County has now been put under the jurisdiction of the Nanyuki Presbytery, while that of Marsabit and Moyale are under the Tumutumu Presbytery. These areas are subdivided for administrative, spiritual, financial and personnel support.

After independence, the government took over the management of the schools, and the church played the role of a sponsor. PCEA has continued to open up more schools in the Eastern Region, and currently, the church sponsors 168 primary schools, 80 secondary schools, and 9 tertiary institutions. PCEA has also ventured into the provision of tertiary education with the establishment of Rubate Teachers College, which also hosts a branch of the Presbyterian University of East Africa. Clive Irvine College of Nursing continues to train medical personnel. The church also participates in the provision of vocational training through the establishment of polytechnics. The church has continued to actively participate in the provision of education in the Eastern Region.

In 1970, a Community Health Department was established under the leadership of Sister Faro. This helped to provide community health through the establishment of outreach clinics. In the 1980s, there was increased activity in the hospital. Specialist clinics were introduced. In 1982, dental and eye clinics were established, and a clinic for the physically handicapped to help rehabilitate those affected by polio was started in 1987. In 1988, psychiatric services were offered, and the Ear Nose and Throat (ENT) clinic was established in 1989 (Chogoria, 1990; Mbae, OI, 2024; Mbabu, OI, 2024).

In 1990, the Patient Welfare Fund was established to help patients who could not pay their medical bills. Between 1991 and 1992, new machines were installed in the Radiography Department. The hospital also opened a private wing for those who could pay more using the NHIF cover. PCEA has also been actively involved in the mitigation of HIV/ AIDS since the 1990s to date. Since 2000, the hospital has been upgrading its services in line with the growing demand for better health care. In 2020, the hospital, in collaboration with the Tharaka Nithi county government, established an Intensive Care unit and a dialysis centre. The medical care system has also been upgraded through the establishment of a palliative care centre for the terminally ill. This has assisted patients suffering from cancer, which has become a burden to society. After the missionaries left Chogoria, PCEA has continued to offer medical services. However, with the withdrawal of external funding, the medical care system was greatly affected, and this forced PCEA to surrender the dispensaries to the community because they could not manage to pay the staff.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

**Conclusion:** In conclusion, the study established that PCEA was brought to the Eastern Region through the activities of the Church of Scotland mission. The first missionaries were Africans sent from Kikuyu and Tumutumu. Dr. Irvine played a major role in establishing the church and the development of health care and education in the Eastern Region.

**Recommendation:** The study recommends that PCEA should devise better methods of storing their data to avoid losing it and preserve their heritage.

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