

WAYS OF ENHANCING UNITY AMONG CHURCHES IN TIGANIA EAST SUB-COUNTY, MERU COUNTY, KENYA

Authors

Andrew Kubai Mitu⁽¹⁾; Dickson Nkonge Kagema⁽²⁾; Lucy Mathai⁽³⁾

Main author email: mituandre830@gmail.com

(1.2.3) Chuka University, Kenya.

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the ways of enhancing unity among churches in Tigania East Sub-county, Meru County, Kenya. In Tigania East Sub-county, Meru County, lack of unity among different churches has emerged as a major challenge to the church's mission. Churches have struggled to come together and establish a shared stance on certain outdated traditional beliefs and practices that no longer contribute positively to the lives of people. The study used descriptive design in collection, analysis, comparison and interpretation of data. The research used questionnaires, interview schedules and focus group discussions to collect the required data. Data collected was presented using tables and pie charts for easier comparison and making of conclusions after the study. The study found that Churches in Tigania East need to invest towards the unity of the church. The Church in Tigania East Sub-county needs to invest more in its unity for effective evangelisation. Theological schools are supposed to aim at producing people who understand the dynamics of society and its needs so that the church can produce Christians who embrace and cope with the challenges that are facing human life. The church must remain united in order to defend the poor and the oppressed from all forms of political exploitation because it is the voice of the voiceless.

Key terms Baptism, Church, Disunity, Fellowship, Mission.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

According to Muthee (2022, O.I.), there is a need for pastors to come together by holding interdenominational events that will bring both the clergy and the Church leaders together. Teaming up to plan such events will be an important forum for the various denominations to meet together, thus building a strong bond that will help in attaining unity. Muthee cited Maua Pastors' Fellowship, Laare Pastors' and Meru Pastors' Fellowship as some of the fellowships that have been able to plan for interdenominational prayer rallies and crusades. Muthee further argued that the Church in Tigania East should not be exceptional. It should borrow from other fellowships in order to build a strong body of Christ that is able to achieve in terms of its mission.

Muchiri (2017) says that a lot has to be done if the church intends to achieve the unity that will help it in fulfilling its purpose. The Church in Tigania East needs to benchmark with other areas in order to understand how such functional Church fellowships were formed. Every Church in Tigania East must understand that it has a role towards building the body of Christ, and therefore, it must team up with other Churches. Every denomination must understand that it has the role of evangelisation, economic transformation and social transformation so that it can team up with other denominations in order to achieve its mission.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Since Christians from all denominations are servants of one Christ, who is the founder of Christianity, they are supposed to embrace unity. Without unity, the church cannot stand to carry out its functions successfully. Ndiokwere (1994) argues that since the early days of division and disunity of the once indivisible church of Christ, things have never been the same again. From the top of the ladder to the foot, from the universal to the particular, the headquarters to the grassroots, division and disunity have continued to the present time and in various parts of the Christian world. This is a clear indication that the problem of disunity has a long history. The church is not united from top to bottom, and therefore, there is a need to investigate the cause of this problem and suggest some of the efforts that can be made to help in solving this problem.

According to Apostle Paul, Christians are supposed to live in unity and oneness. He says in (Romans 15:6) (NIV), "So that all of you together may praise with one voice the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". 1st Corinthians 1:10 (NIV), "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought".

According to Crouch (1993), the effort to bring Churches together for effective evangelisation has been a great concern for a long period of time. Crouch further cites the formation of the Kenya Missionary Council (KMC) in 1924 as one of the efforts towards the establishment of a united Church. The establishment of Kenya Missionary Council represented the broader cooperation, which in the Alliance was limited to the five founding members.

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According to Anderson (1992), Christian believers are supposed to display unity and oneness since they are representing the body of Christ. Christians are supposed to act like the human body, which has many parts that are united. Since every member of the church is important, they should all give service for the common goal of the church. If this unity is maintained fully, many other people who are outside the church will be attracted to Christianity.

The church in Tigania East should borrow from the African Traditional way of life, which, according to Mbiti (1969), made human life relatively stable and static. Chipenda (1993) argues that African Traditional Religion was tolerant in the extreme by nature. Indeed, the African continent never suffered a religiously inspired war prior to the ardent of colonialism. It was under secular and Western religious influences that conflicts and tensions, particularly the Christians and Muslims, began to emerge.

Christians are supposed to put a lot of effort into uniting the church of Christ. Both the clergy and the church members are supposed to invest towards the unity of the church if the church has to be effective in its mission. According to Koigama (2006), ecumenism seeks a movement towards cooperation among Christianity by creating an avenue by which Christians from different denominations can work together. Every Christian community should, therefore, work to the best of its ability to reduce and, if possible, eliminate any obstacle that seems to hinder its unity.

Lana (1987) states that the concept of ecumenism was to make all denominations no strangers and foreigners to one another but rather relatives and as being part of the Christ's household and fellow heirs, members of one body as well as heirs' of God's church on earth in Christ. Eregare (2013) explains this further by stating that "ecumenical initiative is to aim at truth, justice and unity of the body of Christ or Christian churches or denominations." If this is the real meaning of ecumenism, then every church must struggle and achieve it by all means possible.

The government must put proper measures that will safeguard the unity of the church at all times. This can be done through the establishment of a strong body that is mandated to ensure proper vetting before the registration of any church. Pastors and Bishops who apply for the registration of either a church or other religious movements must be vetted critically to ensure that churches and other movements are headed by people who are morally upright so that they can fit into Christianity without bringing unnecessary disunity. Mugambi (1995) states that freedom without responsibility is anarchical, and freedom without limit is self-destruction. The freedom that has been given to the religious movement is contributing to the problem of disunity. The study, therefore, sought to understand the impact of this disunity on the mission of the church in Tigania East Sub-county.

Warambo and Owich (2006) say that Christians should appreciate and respect the practices and beliefs of faith traditions other than that of their own. Different denominations should hold consensus conferences in various areas of operation and understand the practices and beliefs of other denominations. This will solve the problem of disunity because denominations will not attack each other openly, for they will have understood each other clearly. They can hold consensus meetings that will be guided by the principles that are laid down in the Bible to guide the church of Christ.

Different church organisations, like the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), among others, should revisit their objectives so as to invest more in matters of Church unity for effective evangelisation. They should advise all theological institutions to include more content on the issue of unity of the churches. These will help such institutions to produce people who are ready to invest in the unity of all churches. The study used descriptive design in collection, analysis, comparison and interpretation of data. The research used questionnaires, interview schedules and focus group discussions to collect the required data. Data collected was presented using tables and pie charts for easier comparison and making of conclusions after the study.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study used descriptive design in collection, analysis, comparison and interpretation of data. The research used questionnaires, interview schedules and focus group discussions to collect the required data. Data collected was presented using tables and pie charts for easier comparison and making of conclusions after the study.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Holding Interdenominational Crusades and Prayer Rallies

Interdenominational events help bring various denominations together for a common purpose. According to Muthee (2022, O.I.), there is a need for pastors to come together by holding interdenominational events that will bring both the clergy and the church leaders together. Teaming up to plan such events will be an important forum for the various denominations to meet together, thus building a strong bond that will help in attaining unity. Muthee cited Maua, Laare and Meru Pastors' Fellowships as some of the fellowships that have been able to plan interdenominational prayer rallies and crusades. Muthee further argued that the church in Tigania East should not be exceptional. It should borrow from other fellowships in order to build a strong body of Christ that is able to achieve in terms of its mission.

This means that a lot has to be done if the church intends to achieve the unity that will help it to fulfil its purpose. The church in Tigania East needs to benchmark with other areas in order to understand how such functional church fellowships were formed. Every church in Tigania East must understand that it has a role towards building the body of Christ, and therefore, it must team up with other churches. Every denomination must understand that it has the role of evangelisation, economic transformation and social transformation so that it can team up with other denominations in order to achieve its mission.

Warambo and Owich (2006) argue that Christians should appreciate and respect the practices and beliefs of faith traditions other than that of their own. Different denominations should hold consensus conferences in various areas of their operation and understand the practices and beliefs of other denominations. This will solve the problem of disunity because denominations will not attack each other openly, for they will have understood each other clearly. They can hold consensus meetings that will be guided by the principles that are laid down in the Bible to guide the church of Christ. This assertion is supported by Mithika (2022, O.I.), who argued that the church in Tigania East needs to hold

interdenominational crusades and prayer rallies so as to enhance unity among the churches within the Sub-county.

Holding interdenominational crusades and prayer rallies was suggested as one way of promoting unity. This was suggested by 226 respondents, representing 64.20 per cent of the total respondents. The study also advocated that the various churches in the study area can organise common interdenominational prayers and rallies that can help bring both the church leaders and the church members together as a way of strengthening their unity in Tigania East Sub-county. The study also established that when the church members have a common activity that involves all the denominations, then it will be an easy task for them to work together. This will help the church in Tigania East to achieve its agenda of transforming peoples' lives positively.

Muthee (2022, O.I.) advocated that the various denominations in Tigania East Sub-county are supposed to be guided by the principle of love so that they can unite with other churches in the region. This assertion is supported by Mugambi (1995), who argued that different denominations should be guided by the principle of love. This principle should be used to assess whether certain teachings and practices are valid or not. A group whose beliefs and practices promote suffering and disharmony among members does not embody Christ's desire for the church to be one. The principles guiding every church should be assessed based on Biblical teachings. Mugambi (1995) further argues that the church of the future will need to launch a long-term programme for conflict resolution within and between denominations and also in the context of national and international conflicts. Therefore, this study established that by embracing the principle of love, different denominations can hold interdenominational crusades and prayer rallies that can help enhance unity among the churches in Tigania East, Meru County.

Interdenominational Church Leaders Training

This study established that if the church leaders are united, it can be easy to unite the church members, but when the church leaders are divided, then unity between the church members cannot be easy. The research findings show that 144 (40.90%) of the respondents suggested interdenominational leaders' training as a way of enhancing unity among various denominations. The study also established that church leaders need to be trained on ecumenism in order to understand the importance of unity among the denominations.

These findings are in consensus with the argument of Lana (1987) on the concept of ecumenism, who argues that the concept of ecumenism was to make all denominations, not strangers and foreigners to one another, but relatives and as being part of the household of Christ and fellow-heirs, members of one body as well as heirs' of God's church on earth in Christ. Eregare (2013) explains this further by stating that "ecumenical initiative is to aim at truth, justice and unity of the body of Christ or Christian churches or denominations." If this is the real meaning of ecumenism, then every church must struggle and achieve it by all means possible.

The study also established that these trainings can help the leaders in developing a common understanding of the role of the church within the community. When they understand that they have a

common goal of transforming society positively, it can be easy for them to unite in achieving their goals. Kimathi (2022, O.I.) asserted that if all the church leaders understand the roles that the church ought to play in society, it can be easy to achieve unity because they have a common goal that it was founded by Christ himself to achieve. This means that all the church leaders need to understand the reason for unity. During these seminars, leaders from different denominations can have time to share different ideas that are aimed at bringing development and unity to Tigania East Sub-county.

Establishing Functional Pastors/ Ministers Fellowship

The establishment of functional pastors/minister's fellowship was suggested by 86 respondents, representing 24.43 per cent of the total respondents. Functional fellowships mean fellowships that do not just exist but those that serve the purpose for which they were established. Kimathi (2022, O.I.) affirmed that Tigania East Pastors have different Pastors fellowships, but they are not fully functional. He averred that the pastors need to come together and try all the possible means of ensuring that all the denominations are made aware of their existence. This means that pastors/ ministers are supposed to be brought on board, and a clear constitution guiding their operation is drawn. All the pastors/ ministers within their area of operation must be involved from the formation stage so that they can have a clear understanding of their operation. This could help in attaining unity among the denominations in Tigania East, thus making the church achieve its agenda within the area of its operation.

Teaching on the Importance of Unity to the Church

All the church members must be taught the importance of unity. This was suggested by 104 respondents, representing 29.54 per cent of the total respondents. This study established that it is important when all the church members understand the importance of unity, for they can try all the possible means of attaining it. This can be propagated to the society and make the work of evangelism easy. Both the leaders and the church members need to understand the reason for seeking unity. Talking about the new spirit of partnership during the 50th anniversary of the ecumenical encounter in Kenya, Nthamburi (2000) said these words, "the Kenyan Churches need to rethink themselves in terms of being self-propagating, self-governing and self-supporting. On the other hand, it must enjoy the fellowship of other Christians worldwide."

Although Nthamburi (2000) talks about a Church that is self-supporting, he concludes by saying that it must enjoy the fellowship of other Christians worldwide. This argument portrays unity, which in this context is represented by the term "fellowship" because, without unity, there is no fellowship. Unity is therefore presented as a very important factor towards the attainment of a self-propagating, self-governing and self-supporting Church. According to Wako (1993), when he was talking about the role of the National Council of Churches in Kenya, "as a national organisation, NCCCK should be able to guide and have moderating influence that will help in attaining unity among denominations. If the focus is on producing quality Christians, division among Churches will be healed. Everything will fall into place - a better Kenya a better Church."

Teaching a Unit on Ecumenism in all Theological Schools

Mwenda (2022, O.I.) averred that all the pastors/ ministers are expected to have gone through theological training that can equip them with knowledge on church matters. He opined that it should be made compulsory for all the theological schools to include a unit on ecumenism as a way of producing church ministers who understand the reason for unity among all the denominations. This can help impart knowledge to such preachers on how they can achieve unity for the benefit of society. When church leaders are taught in their different theological schools on ecumenism, it can be easy to exercise it when they are practising what they learnt in those schools. This can help the church in Tigania East to achieve unity, thus making it easy to transform the area with the gospel of Christ.

According to Koigama (2006), ecumenism seeks a movement towards cooperation among Christianity by creating an avenue by which Christians from different denominations can work together. Every Christian community should, therefore work to the best of its ability to reduce and, if possible, eliminate any obstacle that hinders its unity. Different church organisations like the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), among others should revisit their objectives so as to invest more on Church unity for effective evangelisation. They should advise all theological institutions to include more content on the issue of unity of the Churches. This can help such institutions to produce people who are ready to invest in the unity of all Churches.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion: In conclusion, this study established that the various churches in Tigania East Sub-county need to be holding interdenominational crusades and prayer rallies. This study also established that various churches in the region need to organise common interdenominational prayers and rallies that can help in bringing both the church leaders and the members together as a way of strengthening their unity. This study affirms that when church members have a common activity that involves all the denominations, then it can be an easy task for them to work together. The study established that there is a need for interdenominational church leaders' training. This is because if the church leaders are united, it can be easy to unite the church members.

Recommendation: Through interdenominational leaders training, the leaders can understand the importance of unity among the churches in Tigania East Sub-county, thus making it easy to achieve its agenda of transforming the society positively. It is, therefore, important for every denomination to invest towards the unity of the church, for without unity, the objective of the church may not be achieved.

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