
Christianity and Social Outreach in Presbyterian Church Nsimeyong, Yaoundé - Cameroon (2016-2023)

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Abstract

For quite some time now, the Church in Cameroon has been preaching the gospel of “love your neighbour as yourself” to hungry and socially vulnerable people but in the majority has often failed to be pragmatic. This study examines the situation in the Presbyterian Church (PC) Nsimeyong, Yaounde-Cameroon since 2009 with evidence that without the social support of Christians, the gospel cannot bear spiritual fruits if not accompanied with true love demonstrated by support to one another. Since then, this congregation has gone passed its traditional responsibility of theoretically propagating the Good News to that of practical implementation. It is true this congregation has been taking many charitable initiatives towards Christians before now, but such philanthropic gestures have quadrupled and the impact and euphoria on the faces and expressions from beneficiaries is evident. The study seeks to understand how PC Nsimeyong preaches the practical gospel. In search for elements of response to this question, the research sorted for data from primary and secondary sources and with the use of the qualitative method, it revealed that Presbyterian Church Nsimeyong is an outstandingly benevolent. It was noted that this congregation, through a committee called “Diakonia committee” has elaborated a social scheme for the aged, internally displaced, orphans, widows, children, students and all those on the margin. This has brought in both the social and spiritual transformation of beneficiaries. The study concludes that other religious denominations must emulate the actions of this committee in order to accomplish the word of God.

Key words; *Christianity and Social Outreach, Presbyterian Church Nsimeyong, Cameroon*

Introduction

Christianity is the Abrahamic religion which preach the worship of Jesus Christ (born some 2000 years after Abraham) It is a major religion stemming from the life, teachings, and death of Jesus of Nazareth in the 1st century AD in the Middle

East¹. The Gospel Coalition has it that from Jerusalem, Christianity was brought to Alexandria, the Egyptian coast by Mark, one of the evangelists in 60 AD². From there, it made its way to Ethiopia. However, Christianity was introduced in Cameroon by Joseph Merrick in 1844. After due negotiation with King William of Bimbia this Jamaican opened the first Baptist mission.³ He was later joined by Alfred Saker who opened the second Baptist mission in Douala in 1845. The Baptist mission was later joined by the Spanish Roman Catholic missionaries of the Order of the Society of Jesus in 1858⁴. They were followed by the German Basel Mission in 1886, following the German annexation of Cameroon in 1884 and later the American Presbyterian mission 1879⁵. That is how the Christian faith find its routes into Cameroon. At independence in 1960/61, the State in the preamble of the 1972 and later the 1996 Cameroon constitution guaranteed freedom of religious worship and practices. By so doing, the constitution establishes the State as secular, prohibits religious harassment and provides for freedom of religion and worship⁶. This gave the opportunity for the proliferation and flourishing of religious denominations in Cameroon. Among the various religious beliefs practiced in the country, Christianity stands as the dominant faith (approximately 70% of the population identifying as Christians), with the Roman Catholic being the largest Christian denomination⁷ Christianity stand out to propagate the good news about the crucifixion of Christ. But today, the practice of this religion has made the faith questionable. Some people believe it is used by the rich to cheat the poor. Those who think in this way argues that religion is a poison which stop fanatics from seeing the injustice of the rich to them. They say that the Priests tell the poor not to complain but to submit to all types of bad treatment, for that is the best way to get to heaven. Unfortunately, the lives and actions of some religious men make some Christians to believe that this false opinion about the purpose of religion is true. Of course, the real meaning of religion is good not bad. It is as well to be remembered that it is often not the religion which is wrong but the few evil people who use its good rules for wrong purposes. Despite this defamatory allegation, it was observed that there are some Christian denominations that still hold on to the gospel of Jesus Christ. One of such is the Presbyterian Church

¹ F.K. Buah, (1965), *The Ancient World, A New History for Secondary Schools and colleges*, Book I, Second Edition, Macmillan Publishers, pp. 157-159

² The Gospel Coalition, *The History of Christianity in Africa/Africa Study Bible*, africa.thegospelcoalition.org, consulted on 12/06/2024, at 4:05pm.

³ V. G, FANSO, (2017), *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges: From Prehistorical times to the twenty-first Century*, Team Work Press, Bamkika'ya-Kumbo, pp.126-127.

⁴ Ibid. p. 128.

⁵ Victor Julius Ngoh, *History of Cameroon since 1800*, Pressbook, Limbe, 1996, pp. 91-92.

⁶ Constitution of 2nd June, 1972 and Law No. 96-06 of 18th January, 1996 to amend the 1972 Constitution.

⁷ Mahmood Rahan, *Cameroon National Religion*, <https://nationallopedia.com/cameroon-religion-christianity/> consulted on 06/10/2024 at 5pm.

Nsimeyong in Yaounde. Through a committee called the Diakonia Committee, this congregation is doing its best to blend the gospel to action. An act that need to be celebrated and ventilated. Therefore, this paper is intended to dick deep into the activities of this committee and its impact on humanity.

Presentation of Presbyterian Church Nsimeyong

Presbyterian Church Nsimeyong is found in the East Mungo North Presbytery, precisely in the Yaounde VI municipality. Created in 1991, this congregation is one of the renounced congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon⁸. It is renounced not only in architecture, grandeur of worshipers (more than 2000), but especially in its outreach to socially vulnerable. According to Emmanuel B. Masok, Rev. Pastor of this parish, there has been a consistent increased in the number of socially dependents of this congregation especially from October 2016 as a result of an influx of war victims from the North West and South West regions of Cameroon. These internally displaced came in with a handful of social needs that almost brought the church to its knees. As a response to this, a Diakonia Committee was put into place to meet up with God's recommendations in Hebrews 13:16, Acts 20:35, Proverbs 22:9... to give to the needy and poor⁹. This research is intended to x-ray the humanitarian actions of this congregation through this committee and how it has relief its vulnerable Christians from trauma and keep them hopeful and especially faithful.

Picture 1: Presbyterian Church Nsimeyong-Yaounde



⁸ Interview with Edwin Njoh, 50 years, Entrepreneur and Former President of Christian Men Fellowship (CMF) Presbyterian Church Etuog-Ebe Yaounde, 13/06/2024, at 9am.

⁹ Interview with Emmanuel B. Masok, Parish Pastor of Nsimeyong, 50 years, Yaounde, 31/01/2022 at 4:15 pm.

Source: Author's Collection 13/03/2022

Contrary to the believe by Confidence Ngam Chia¹⁰ and Jean Paul Tagheu¹¹ that the church is a money shop for business and trafficking and that it is the cause of poverty and violence today, PC Nsimeyong still upholds God's message that "If we are rich and see others in need, yet close our hearts against them, how can we claim that we love God? My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action"¹². This can be mirrored in activities of the Diakonia Committee of this congregation.

The Creation, objectives and Structure of the Diakonia Committee

Presbyterian Church Nsimeyong-Cameroon has discovered that the good news cannot penetrate the soul of a hungry, sick and or socially vulnerable Christian and decided to blend the traditional way of preaching with outreach to the needy, the reason for the creation for the creation of the Diakonia Committee. The word Diakonia has a Greek verb-root "*Diakoneo*" which means "I serve, I minister, I wait on". The noun root is "*Diakonos*" which also means servant or deacon. The notion of servant behind this word is biblical. This inspiration was drowned from the diaconate of early believers, as seven men filled by the Holy Spirit were chosen to take control of financial matters while the apostles gave all their time to the teaching of the word of God (Acts 6:1-7)¹³. Besides, Paul recommends this ministry type to the Romans: So, we are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us. If our gift is to speak God's message, we should do it according to the faith that we have; if it is to serve, we should serve; if it is to teach, we should teach; if it is to encourage others, we should do so. Whoever shares with others should do it generously; whoever has authority should work hard; whoever shows kindness to others should do it cheerfully. (Roms. 12:6-8, GNB)¹⁴. It was the growing and cumbersome nature of the needs of fiddles and the desire of the session under the stewardship of Mukoko Thomas, the then Rev. Pastor to separate the management of spiritual need (preaching) from financial (material and human needs) that led to the creation of the Diakonia Committee in PC Nsimeyong in 2009.

¹⁰ Confidence Ngam Chia, (2021), Religious Extremism and its Accentuation of Poverty and Violence in the Post-colonial African Economy, in *Journal of Arts and Humanities*, vol. 4. No. 2, February 2021, pp. 139-159.

¹¹ Jean Paul Tagheu, Religious Business and Violence in Africa: From material poverty to Spiritual Poverty, in *Hekema Review*, No. 52, May 2015. p. 64.

¹² Good News Bible. 2016. Bible Society of Nigeria, (1John 3, 17-18) p. 315

¹³ Good News Bible. 2016. Bible Society of Nigeria, p. 159.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 204.

This committee is made up of a twenty-man group of selected Christians who pledged themselves to administer the basic needs of fellow Christians. The executive of this committee was manned and coordinated by Mukum Pius, Tabala Felicite, Ngene Silvanus, Neba Stanley, Adig Emmanuel, Nkelle Ndeki, Oruh Julius, Salome Yewong and Mbong Walter Messembe¹⁵.

Eligibility into the committee was based on one's humanitarian and management qualities, availability and dedication to God's service, the faith possessed etc. The pioneer responsibility of the group was to enable the church meet up with the health needs of Christians. But the passage of time saw a multiplicity of social needs of these Christians which necessitated adaptation. This saw a revision of the original objective of the committee. To that effect, a more holistic and new vision of the committee was introduced by Emmanuel B. Masok in 2015. It was now assigned to harness and coordinate the congregation's drive to meet with the social needs of the poor and needy so as to permit clergy to concentrate on the preaching of the gospel. The Diakonia Committee saw its responsibilities opened and diverse¹⁶.

It was therefore, segmented into different desks of activities that reflected the needs of the needy. These desks are social desk, economic desk, health desk, education and youth desk. These desks have as activities to raise funds to support start-ups, sponsor vocational training in motor mechanics, welding, carpentry, building, hair dressing, pay school fees for orphans, organizing literary classes to those who can't read and write, provide food and medications to internally displaced, widows, the old and many people on the margin¹⁷.

Sources of Income

The congregation has set aside routine fund raising to enable diakonia committee function. Besides, the church has dedicated the last Sunday of the month to the beginning of the lent season for the diakonia fund raising. The committee on its part has created other income generating avenues like organizing monthly birth day thanks giving, during which birth day cakes, stickers, plates, bags and other gadgets are sold to worshippers to fuel the covers of this committee. Funding for this committee also comes from activities like love offerings (special biblical love passages prepared for love ones). There are also thanks-giving gifts and offerings. All these and individual financial supports

¹⁵ Interview with Emmanuel Adig, 41 Years, Teacher, Financial Secretary of the Diakonia Committee, Yaounde, 31/03/2022 at 12 noon.

¹⁶ Interview with Silvanus Ngame, 49 Years, Secretary Diakonia Committee, Presbyterian Church Nsimeyong Yaounde, 06/02/2022 at 10:30am.

¹⁷ Ibid.

especially from members of the committee and well-wishers permits this committee to run its activities.

Activities

This committee has lived a landmark in the lives of the young, the old, men and women, disabled, orphans, internally displaced and many other needy Christians of the congregation. For example, huge sums of money; about 10,432,500fcfa, 9,824,600fcfa, 3,160,000fcfa, 1,240,000fcfa, 5,300,000fcfa and 500,000fcfa was spend in 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 respectively on social needs of these Christians. These funds were used to provide spiritual materials like Bibles and church documents and or other groceries., provided assistance to sick and the helpless (poor and needy, widows and orphans) of the congregation, pay visits to visits to prisons and orphanages, assistance to needy students, school dropouts as well as encouraged start-ups.

Achievements

a) In Education and Professional Training

PC Nsimyong through its Diakonia committee changed so many lives, especially in the field of education and professional training. With respect to education, scholarships (payment of school fees) were awarded to some active but underprivileged students of the congregation, most of them in the University of Yaounde 1, the Yaounde Teaching Hospital and Government Teachers Training Collages¹⁸. In the domain of professional training, some beneficiaries were trained in graphic designing, hair dressing, office automation, driving, hardware maintenance, cookery, carpentry, nursing and many others¹⁹. In 2021, the church awarded scholarship and professional training to about eight beneficiaries that worth about 1,145,000fcfa

Besides, scholarships and professional training offered to fiddles of this congregation were didactic materials mostly to orphans and internally displaced children from the North West and South West regions of the country. This paper also noticed the encouragement of academic excellence. Students on honour rolls were granted scholarships for the coming academic year. This ranges from tuition

¹⁸ Interview with Clover Afegehui, 37 years, Civil servant and member of the committee, Yaounde, 15/12/2023, at 1pm.

¹⁹ Interview with Brielle Diffo, 26 years, Graduate GTTC, beneficiary, Yaounde, 15/12/2023, at 5:30pm

to didactic materials²⁰. What a smile put on the faces of the laureates. On the other hand, holiday classes were organized for the weaker ones to catch-up.

b) In Healthcare and Trauma Healing

This used medical specialists of the congregation like Mukum Pius and a host of many other health practitioners to salvage the health challenges of Christians especially the aged. According to this health practitioner, this was by organizing educative talks and sensitization on killer diseases of the time. Carry out free screening in diabetes, cervical, breast and prostate cancer, visible growth, hepatitis and many other diseases. Medications and immune boosting food items are also given to the aged²¹.

The socio-political crisis in the North West and South West of Cameroon brought untold horror, fear and helplessness on the people of these regions as they witnessed the brutal execution of love ones and narrowly escaped from the hands of either the Cameroonian military or the Ambazonian defence forces. Though fled and live in other regions of the country, this people continue to harbour both physical and internal wounds. Discovered that internally displaced had physical and heart wounds, Presbyterian Church Nsimeyong and the diakonia committee in particular played and are still playing a remarkable role in healing these wounds. Besides material and medical supplies to these people and their siblings, the church equally used the scripture and some boosting passages from the scripture companion booklet for trauma healing to heal the internal wounds. In this booklet, the American Bible Society demand Christians to make victims of circumstances feel comfortable by bringing required practitioners to attend to their immediate needs, show love to them by helping to carry their loads, pray for them and encourage them to trust in God, directing or reading to them Psalm 62:8 and Psalm 103:3²².

According to Ngeme Silvanus, one other document used to heal heart wounds of this people is overcoming the storms of life. Internally displaced were taken to chapter which focused on the realities of life. Here, allusion was drowned from Isaiah 43:2, which made them to understand that there will be moments in life when children of God shall pass through difficult situations but the purpose

²⁰ Interview with Grace Fai, 39 years, Student, University of Yaounde I, Yaounde, 18/12/2023, 2pm

²¹ Interview with Pius Mukum, 45 years, physician and member of the committee, Yaounde, 18/12/2023, at 10am

²² American Bible Society, (2016), Scripture Companion Booklet for Trauma Healing, For Small Groups using Healing the Wounds of Trauma, Trauma healing institute, Mont Zion, pp.8-9.

of trails and sufferings is not to destroy but to fortify and promote God's children²³. These documents and many others were used to build and uplift the faith of these depressed Christians.

c) Other Achievements

The diakonia committee also paid great attention to in-mates and orphans. They organized irregular visits to the Yaounde central and many other prisons as well as orphanages. The economic desk of this committee also encouraged start-ups. Because of the minimal resources of this committee, some minimal funds were given to a few unemployed and unskilled faithful of the congregation to enable them start small businesses. One of beneficiaries benefited the sum of 80,000fcfa, confessed a change in her life as result of this gift. "I am able to meet-up with the feeding of family, buy didactic materials, dresses and other basic necessities for my children" were the words of this food vendor who saluted the initiative of the church, praying for the success of the diakonia committee²⁴. But unfortunately, this committee is undergoing some challenges that threaten its existence.

Challenges of the Committee

Challenges of the Diakonia committee ranges from limited resources, difficulty in the choice of beneficiary, lack of follow-up and misappropriation of resources by some beneficiaries and the list is in exhaustive.

a) Limited Resources

Mobilizing resources for the accomplishment of the mission of this committee is an uphill task, most especially as some Christians lack of the spirit of sharing and have lose sight of the biblical passage on helping the needy as indicated in 2 Corinthians chapter 9. According to Emmanuel Adig, such "selfish Christians" accused the church for being so money minded. On the other hand, these Christians argue that there is no gospel in the church any longer and that all that is preached is money, with offering given more than three times a single church service. This has limited the resources and scope of fellowship of this committee despite cry not to limit its influence on to Christians of the congregation but indirectly extended to relatives of these Christians. This is to say limited resources render its choice of beneficiaries more complicated.

²³ Monica Egbe Agbor, *Overcoming the Storms of Life, Transitional Periods are not Destructive Periods*, Mama Press Yaounde Cameroon

²⁴ Interview with Brenda Messala, 24 years, Unemployed beneficiary, Yaounde, 18/12/2023, 12noon

b) Difficulty in the Choice of Beneficiary

The selection of beneficiaries is an up-hill task to the diakonia committee, most especially as the demand is above the means. The choice of beneficiary is based on the committee's appreciation of the different needy cases at hand. In the face of this situation, the objectivity of the discretion of the committee is sometimes questioned by some Christians who for one reason or the other did not have the opportunity. A situation Ngeme Silvanus frowned at because it does not only tarnish the image of the church, but equally destabilize the committee and its good intentions.

d) Poorly Conceived Projects and Lack of Follow-Up of Support to Beneficiaries

One of the weak points of the Diakonia Committee is financing ghosts or poorly conceived projects **and** lack of follow-up of beneficiaries, especially those who obtain support for start-ups and for professional training. It was observed that assistance is given to applicants without any defined sustainable development project. Besides, the committee lacks incubators or a qualified technical bench to coach and nurture beneficiaries to maturity. Consequently, these funds most often are not used for the original income generating and sustainable projects. Most of them being novice in their respective domains, wind off even before they realised.

Conclusion

It is true that now-a-days, many religious groups are undergoing internal disputes within Christian communities over the creation of new ecclesiastical districts, election of church leaders, financial mismanagement of church revenue and many other ungodly practices, but the PC Nsimeyong which is not exempted from that is a model in preaching the love of God and loving your neighbor as yourself²⁵. This research observed like Salome Yewong that through its Diakonia Committee, it has succeeded to put the gospel side-by-side societal needs. While it is feeding souls with the Good News, at the same time, it is giving health to the sick, jobs to the jobless, education to the underprivileged, food to the hungry, joy to the aged... By so doing, hope is given to the hopeless²⁶. Though these social ills are a very big blow to the church in general, but believing that with God all things are possible, the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon is able to stand the test of time in the relief of its Christians. This congregation may have its own internal

²⁵ International Religious Freedom Report for 2017, United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.

²⁶ Interview with Salome Yewong, 37 years, teacher and spiritual elder of the committee, Yaounde, 15/12/2023, at 9am.

challenges as any other human group, but its actions and modus vivendi of preaching the gospel warrant encouragement. There is the need for permanent donors because their only source of revenue is Christians and services of well-wishers. There is also the need for purported beneficiaries to be given adequate business training before disbursement of funds²⁷. However, surely, Christ is already happy with what is achieved and is anointing the benevolent.

References

a) Primary (Oral) sources

Name	Age (Years)	Status/Function	Place & date
Adig Emmanuel	41	teacher, financial secretary of the diakonia committee	Yaounde, 31/03/2022
Afegehui Clover	37	Civil servant member of the committee	Yaounde, 15/12/2023
Ambe Lilian	33	Graduate GTTC	Yaounde, 12/12/2023
Auk Etta Joseph	29	Student, university of Yaounde I	Yaounde, 12/12/2023
Diffo Brielle	26	Graduate GTTC	Yaounde, 15/12/2023
Fai Grace	39	Student, university of Yaounde I	Yaounde, 18/12/2023
Messala Brenda	24	Unemployed beneficiary	Yaounde, 18/12/2023
Mukum Pius	45	Physician and member of committee	Yaounde, 18/12/2023
Ngeme Silvanus	49	Secretary diakonia committee	Yaounde, 06/02/2022
Njoh Edwin	50	Entrepreneur and Former President of Christian Men Fellowship (CMF) Presbyterian Church Etuog-Ebe	Yaounde, 13/06/2024
Rev. Masok B. Emmanuel	50	Parish pastor of Nsimeyong	Yaounde, 31/01/2022

²⁷ Interview with Joseph Etta Auk, 29 years, student, University of Yaounde I. Yaounde, 12/12/2023, at 11:20am.

Wirkom Mark	30	Student, university of Yaounde I	Yaounde, 18/12/2023
Yewong Salome	37	Teacher	Yaounde, 15/12/2023

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