



CULTURE AND ORDINATION OF WOMEN AS CLERGY: A CASE STUDY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF EAST AFRICA, KENYA

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Accepted: December 31, 2022

ABSTRACT

The question of ordaining women to pastoral ministry has been a major issue in many denominations in the world and therefore the focus of this study was to find out how the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) has been handling the ordination of women as a clergy. This was done by assessing the ratio of ordained women clergy against men at different times in PCEA as church recruits men and women for ordination purpose. For the purpose of accuracy in this study, the researcher concentrated with collecting the data for all the clergy who had retired until 2022. The main objective of this study was to find out whether there is disparity between male and female clergy in the PCEA. The field research was held in two of the five regions of PCEA Church namely: Central and Eastern. The target population was 128 retired clergy in PCEA Church. The study employed a descriptive survey research design in which quantitative and qualitative research approach were used, in the corroboration of the finding based on Gall & Berge sample size determination approach, a sample size of 52 respondents was selected through stratified sampling to ensure that each member of the population had an equal chance of participating in the study. The main instruments of this research were in-depth interview and questionnaires. Quantitative data collected was coded, tabulated and analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 25.0. The summarized, organized, and analyzed data were obtainable in bar graphs, pie charts and tables. Major findings found that none of women clergy had retired in the area of study by the year 2020. The major recommendation of this study was PCEA Church to apply affirmative action in the selection of men and women in the ordained holy ministry. This study is also applicable to other denominations where the ordination of women in the holy ministry is still an issue

Key words: Ordination, Clergy, priest, pastor Culture, affirmative action, female clergy, calling, PCEA, PUEA

CITATION: Njoroge, S. N. (2023). Culture and ordination of women as clergy: A case study of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Kenya. *The Strategic Journal of Business & Change Management*, 9 (4), 28 – 37.

INTRODUCTION

This article is a result of field research that was conducted by the author in 2022 for the purpose of the celebration of forty (40) years of women ordination ministry in PCEA Church. The paper addresses how different denominations view ordination of women into priesthood, assessment of the ratio of ordained women clergy to men in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Cultural view on ordination of women clergy and end with recommendation for the same. In this study, the term culture is defined as ideas, customs and social behavior of a particular people or society (Kwaramba, 2019). On the other hand the term ordination comes from the Latin word “**ordinare**” meaning “put in order” as in religious office, it is being set apart in the office of priesthood in a church. The term Clergy means a group ordained to perform pastoral functions in a church. Other words which synonymously mean the same are a church minister, pastor, reverend or a priest. In this study the term ordination will be taken as the process by which a person is understood to be consecrated and set apart by people for the administration of various religious rites. (Mupangwa, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper anchors the theory of patriarchal ideology by Iglitzen & Ross (1976) and gender ideology by Peterson & Runyan (1993). In Patriarchal Ideology, it postulates that within patriarchal community, the roles of women are influenced by Patriarchal ideology. These two theories are well integrated in literature review, findings and discussion in this study. Very few women as will be seen later are ordained into priesthood in some denominations, while some other Churches like Roman Catholic have strong stands never to ordain them soon or later.

Ordination of women into priesthood for long time has been controversial in many Churches such as Roman Catholic, Southern Baptist, Orthodox, Akorino & Mormon sects and many more indigenous and African instituted Churches. The Roman Catholic Church in particular believe that

women can not be ordained and becomes priests, Bishops or popes because Jesus selected men only as his apostles and so only men lead the church and perform sacraments. Further the teaching and tradition (culture) of early Church fathers was that ordination was to be reserved for men only because of liturgy and that women should be only appointed for prayer which is duty for all according to the Apostolic tradition, AD 215 (Helmen, 2012).

In 1994 the pope John Paul II formerly declared that Roman Catholic Church does not have power to ordain women into priesthood. Church fathers whose teachings were against to priesthood of women in their teachings were: Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hyppolytus, Didascalia and Firmilian (Helmen, 2012). However in 1976, the Pontifical Biblical determined that there is no Biblical reason to prohibit women’s ordination.

In December 1970 it is in record that a catholic Bishop Felix Davidek ordained a woman by the name Ludmila Javorova in the underground Church of communist Czechoslovakia while Cardinal Miloslav VIK of prague confirmed that he had ordained five women in the same time.

Ever since the garden of Eden when God told Satan that the seed of the women would bruise his head, the devil has been ferociously attacking women all over the world leave alone ordination. (Genesis 3: 14 – 18). It is very unfortunate in some countries like Europe and North America women suffer more injustices than men. In the united state, women still earn only 74% of the salary that men earn for doing the same job (Cunningham, Hamilton & Rogers, 2017). When bias against women is perpetuated by Christians, the message it send is that God is unjust.

According to Cuning, Hamilton & Rogers (2017), when God starts great might work of Spirit, he often use women in the forefront. Historians say that in most spiritual awakening, women were accepted as ministers in the early stages. The greatest spiritual awakening in history that was experienced by the Moravians in the eighteenth

century in eastern Germany was spearheaded by women.

The Spiritual awakening that Transformed England and America in the late 1700 and 1800 centuries were led by George Whitefield, John and Charles Wesley where the history indicate that their mother was godly by the name Susanna, who took time to teach each of her surviving children beside spending quality times in prayers. Mrs. Wesley preached to more than two hundred people every week in prayer meetings which she held in her husband's parish, further her son called John used women leaders for the small groups called classes which spread their revival so effectively. At one time Wesley said "**Since *God uses women in the conversion of sinners, who am I that I should withstand God?*" (Borath, 2013).**

When Charles Finney started Oberlin Bible College in America in early 18th Century, it was the first to allow women to study theology alongside men. He always invited women to pray and speak in public worship. In fact he was the first protestant leader to train women in theology and in 1853, Antoinette Brown who was one of his former students was ordained as the first woman clergy in America. Other evangelical colleges that allowed women to study theology were Moody Bible Institute and Gordon Bible College. Dwight Moody was quick to allow women to preach. Simpson who started the Christian ministry alliance (CMA) included women in all levels of his leadership. Besides women pastors, evangelist and teachers, four of the CMA's first eight vice presidents were women (Cunningham, Hamilton & Rogers, 2017).

Pastor Phoebe Palmer & Hannah Whitall Smith were the two most influential women in America in the holiness movement of 19th century yet their quest for evangelism was undisputed. By 1980 there was only 6% of female clergy in America and by 2016 they were 20%, the biggest barrier to women clergy especially in Mega Churches is advancing to senior positions such as Bishop or Archbishop or even being one of the officials of the

office of the General Assembly in the Presbyterian Churches all over the world (Heathen, 2022).

In Africa, ordination for women has been practiced for the last four decades either as deacon, elders or a clergy depending on the faith and structure of some denominations. Africa has been referred to as the cradle of religion in which the majorities are women and so denying women the opportunity to be ordained is more of a disgrace to them. Women have held key positions especially in the mainstream Churches but not the topmost. In evangelical Churches, majority of the women are now in the stage of being ordained in the office of Bishops in Africa.

A Christian woman in Africa today find it difficult to ascend to senior positions in leadership, such as being an ordained clergy which is highest position in church set up that a woman can reach. This is simply because of the unfavorable environment such as traditional culture, social economic and political barriers. Other factors that hinder women from ascending to power are the history of enforcing patriarchal values (Gathogo, 2008).

Unlike the secular world, women representation in a church administration in the highest level is an issue that can not be ignored. In Africa tradition religion (ATR), women played a very important role especially in the religion activities where they were trained as priest and diviners, they could pray for the community as well as communicating with the living dead and spirit

(Akiiki, 2004). When the missionaries came to Africa, they came with patriarchal minds to the disadvantage of women as they failed to acknowledge their religious roles, they limited the roles of women to feminine role (Phiri , 1997).

In PCEA Church, the ordination of women has been practiced since 1982 when the first woman was ordained by the name Rev. Nyambura. Njoroge (Mombo, 2004). In most of African Churches, the ordination of women is viewed in three lenses

which are: historical perspective of a particular denomination, the local content and the leadership of the immediate context. It is very unfortunate that it has been noted in some churches the women's organization are one that are opposed to the ordination of women more than men. The reason behind the ordination of women has varied from one denomination to another and relate to how each of the denomination has been started and was structured. Common argument put forward used against women's ordination was the notion that a priest is the icon of Christ and therefore should be male, Jesus appointing males to be his disciples, the question of husband being the head of the family as indicated in the some Pauline epistles (Ephesians 5:21—30, 1Timothy 2:11-16, 3 : 1-7).

African opaqueness of gender role also contributed a lot in hindering the ordination of women. Most African culture used to take women as a house wife bringing up children, and sex objects but never a leader, male had a mindset that women are to be seen but not to be heard. When the author of this paper went to preach to Maasai land in 2015, a woman could not receive Jesus Christ without first asking permission from her husband, further no male could allow any woman to preach to them. One male PCEA Church elder in one of the Presbyteries had to avoid participating in Holy Communion for the first time that because it was being administered by a female Clergy, while another evangelical elder snatched a microphone just as a female pastor Rev. Phoebe was about to preach and said "I am happy, I wasn't born a woman".

In 1979, the late Bishop Kivengere of Anglican Church of Uganda ordained several women as deacons and later on ordained three of them as pastors in 1983 amid opposition by other Bishops. These women pastors were Margaret Byekwaso, Grace Dyabahika & Debora Micungwe who later on became school chaplains. Earlier in Kenya Archbishop of the Church of Province in Kenya had ordained Lucia Okuthe as deacon in 1980 and this

provoked a fierce battle with other Bishops in Kenya.

The Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) is a Christian denomination that ascribes to Reformed theology and therefore governed by both teaching and ruling elders. Presbyterian Churches traces their roots in 16th century during the reformation period. It's all over in the world (PCEA Manual, 1998). This church was brought in East Africa in 1891 as Christian mission specifically in Kenya at Kibwezi under the name 'The East Africa Scottish mission' and it was transferred to Kikuyu in 1898 and later on, handed over to the Church of Scotland in 1901. Today, PCEA Church is divided and sub-divided into various administrative and pastoral oversight branches in East Africa namely Presbyteries, parishes and congregations (PCEA Practice and Procedure, 1998).

PCEA Church covers three East African countries, namely: Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda with its headquarters in Nairobi Kenya. This Church is further divided into five regions in Kenya namely: Nairobi, Central, Eastern, Mt. Kenya and Rift Valley Region. These regions are sub-divided into 57 Presbyteries (PCEA Manual, 1998). The Central and Eastern region which marks the socio-location of this study consist of twenty-five presbyteries (PCEA diary, 2022). This church strictly ordains clergy from the age of twenty-five to forty-five, but would only ordain clergy above forty-five years of age under a resolution of the General Assembly. PCEA train and ordain both men and women who preach the word of God, administer sacraments and declare God's message of pardon to penitent sinners on earth (PCEA Manual, 1998).

Other functions of PCEA Church clergy are to shepherd the parishioners in obedience to great commission of Christ through the preaching of the word and the administration of sacraments (Holy Communion and Baptism). The church worship is led through strict ethical doctrines and teachings rooted in the ministry of word, training by faith, guidance, giving pastoral care, warning and encouragement by interceding for the parishioners,

burying and mourning the dead as well as visiting the sick. A minister is ordained for life unless with the approval of the Presbytery to resigns from ministry or is deposed (PCEA Practice and procedure manual, 1998).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey research design in which quantitative and qualitative research approach were adopted, based on Gall & Borges (2017) Sample size determination formula, a

sample size of 52 respondents was selected through stratified sampling to ensure that each member of the population had an equal chance of participating in the study. The main instruments of research were in-depth interviews and questionnaires. Quantitative data collected was coded, tabulated and analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 25.0. The summarized, organized, and analyzed data were obtainable in bar graphs, pie charts and tables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

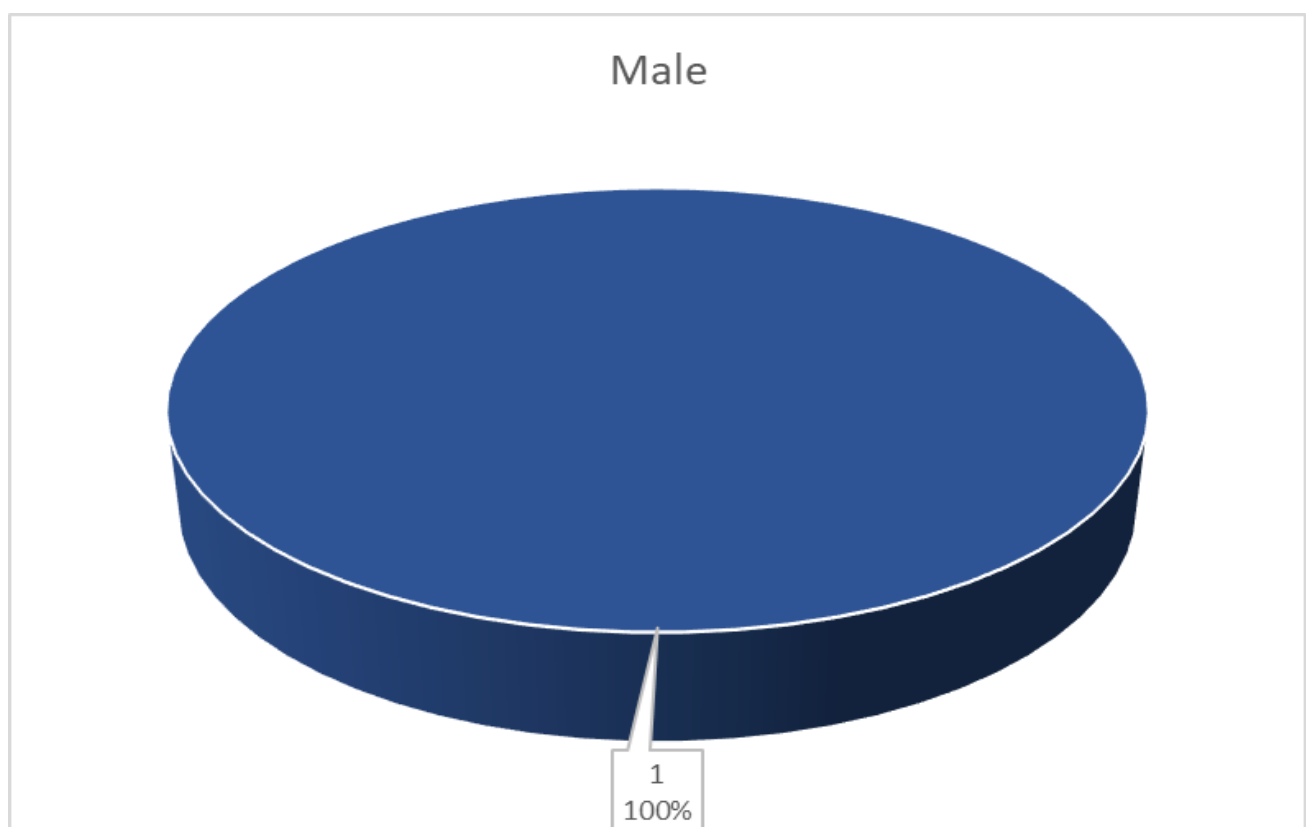


Figure 1 : Gender of the Retired Clergy, n = 52. Source: Field Data (2022).

The respondents were asked to indicate their gender whether male or female and the findings Presented in Figure 1 showed that all 100% of the retired clergy were males. This illustrates there was not a single female clergy so far who had retired in PCEA in both Central and Eastern regions, hence there was gender disparity in favor of men.

The above trend coincide with studies on

preparation for retired clergy in PCEA by Ngere (2012), where male were 89% against female 11%, Kariuki (2019), also did a Psychosocial of PCEA clergy soon before they retire, where male were 79% and female 21% , in Mwamba's (2019) research findings also in PCEA male were found to be 71% and female 29%.

The reason why there were only male retired clergy in the two regions is that in the beginning, PCEA

was not ordaining women into priesthood until in 1982 when the first female was ordained in the ministerial priesthood under the influence of 9th and 10th moderator of the General Assembly, the late Rev. Dr. John Gatu (Mwamba, 2019), who was a proponent for women ordination into priesthood. The first woman to be ordained in PCEA was Rev. Nyambura Njoroge in 1982, in PCEA, Bahati Martyrs. As at July 2022, PCEA had ordained 75 female clergy

into priesthood out of 550 ordained clergy. However, ordination in some denominations remains controversial due to the fact that Jesus had 12 male disciples as cited by Mwamba in (Njoroge, 2014).

Below is a similar findings of a study that was done showing the gender of ordained clergy since 1926 to 2012 (Wainaina, 2015).

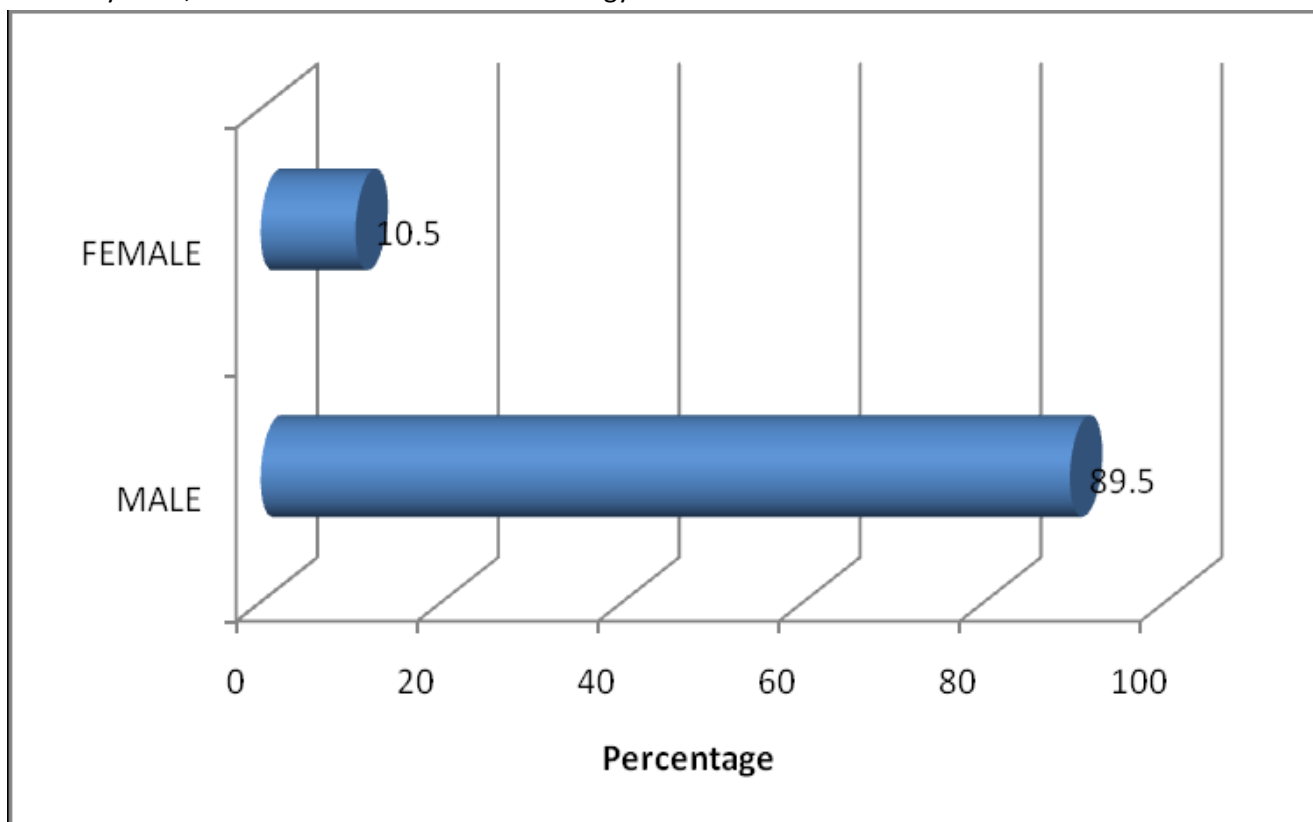


Figure 2: Gender of the ordained ministers since first ordination in 1926-2012 Source: (Wainaina, 2015).

The findings in Figure 2. indicated that the participation of women as ministers was still very low. Therefore, the church must find ways and means of improving the situation. The participation of women as ministers remained in an indeterminate state, before an interpretation was made by the church in 1976- fifty years after the first ordination of the African male ministers. The General Assembly resolved in its judgment that

there was no biblical or theological reason why a woman could not be ordained into the ministry of word and sacrament provided that she satisfied the laid down requirements set by the committee of training and personnel development of the church.

To assess whether the disparity of women leaders leave alone clergy against male in a top PCEA Committee called business committee this study was also carried (Wainaina, 2015).

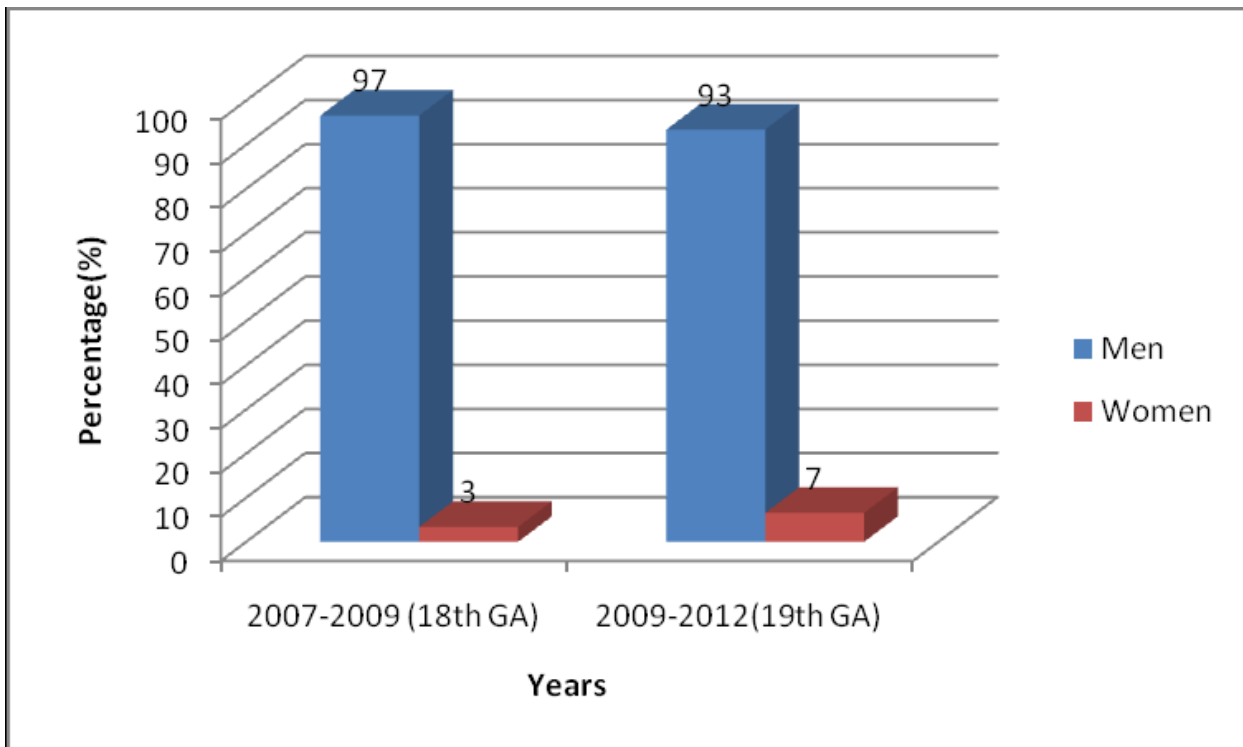


Figure 3: Men and Women Representation in PCEA Business Committee Source: (PCEA, Report of the 18 th and 19 th General Assembly, 2012: 237 (2012) Source (Wainaina, 2015).

These results showed that women are underrepresented in the administrative positions of the church. This finding agrees with Mwaura’s assertion that Western Christianity, whose tradition, mainline Christianity in Africa adopted, provided women with no leadership roles in their church structures (Mwaura ,2005:421). Nthamburi (1991:86) makes an observation that while women are the most faithful members of the bible study groups and prayer fellowships, the church has not accorded them the rightful place as prominent church leaders. Esther a minister, (O.I. 24.11.2011), indicated that “women often find themselves excluded from decision making positions even in issues that directly affects them”. Historically, leadership has carried the notion of masculinity and the belief that men make better leaders than women which is still common today. This practice would be interpreted as discriminating against the women.

Hearn (2009), indicated that gender gap can be hooked up to church patriarchy mindset. The ignorance of women by some denominations is

because of society norms that regard women as second-class citizen. In order to curb gender biasedness in future, there is need for the PCEA Church to apply affirmative action when recruiting people in the holy ordained ministry. This may include setting certain percent for female clergy whenever there is an intake for new clergy.

Women played a key roles in the growth of the church, though Jews were taking women as second citizen, Jesus Christ always endorsed the ministry of women, he used even to teach them and associate with them, a notable evidence is Martha and Mary who were sisters to Lazarus who Jesus resurrected. This Mary is the one who poured expensive perfume on the Lord and wiped her feet with her hair (John 11: 1- 2).

In the three greatest events of Jesus’ life , his birth, death and resurrection, women were in the spotlight. In his birth, God used an earthly woman to give birth to Jesus. In his resurrection, Jesus Christ honored women appearing first to Mary Magdalene, further women were the first to find the empty tomb of Jesus Christ and Jesus told them

to go and tell the others that he was alive (John 20 : 1 – 2). This is a clear indication that Jesus was endorsing women to do the work of evangelism. In the apostolic age there was a clear indication that women were ministering alongside men.

It is very unfortunate that some African indigenous like Akorino and Much water sects have continued to limit women from not only ordination but even preaching in the church simply because of the Misinterpretation of the scripture. They normally quote the word of Apostle Paul to the Church of Corinthians that women should remain silent in the church (1Cor 14:34). This was just a situational statement meant specifically for that moment, this is because the Temple was divided into three main sections , the first one being holy for the priest, the second for men and the third for women and aliens, so some women were making noise in the back and were told to ask their husbands when they went back home .

The words of prophet Joel are clear that says and afterword, “I will pour out my spirit on all people your sons and daughters will prophesy “(Joel 2:28). So this is a clear indication that women are in the God’s plan to prophesy, preach, teach and evangelize. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit Filled all men and women who were in the upper room and they spoke in tongue meaning that God blesses all people irrespective of the gender, so blocking women to minister in the ministry is fighting the spirit of God (Acts 2:1, 1 :14}.

Further, guided by the same misinterpretation that women should not speak in the Church, an influential woman by the name Sophie Mueller in Columbia started about five hundred Churches in 1940 when working as a missionary, but since she has been taught that women should remain silent in the church, she was teaching her converts outside her church. Another Chinese woman evangelist by the name Dora Yu who was greatly influenced by godly women and missionaries, when she was taught about women remaining silent in the Church , the work of several effective women in China was stopped. At one occasion men hid behind the

curtain and listened these women teaching other women, they found that the teachings were so good that they took notes and went to preach to other men. For them they considered teaching plagiarized sermon more righteous than a woman preaching the word of God (Bozarth, 2013).

Ordination provides space for women to contribute to the well-being of the people in a given community. According to women’s ordination conference (2010) the following points were given as to why women should be priested: Through baptism in Jesus Christ the distinction between male and women is erased and women should be able to answer God’s call to priesthood ministry, for in Christ there is no Jew or Greek, slave or citizen, man or woman since we are all one in Christ (Galatians 3:28). The second Vatican council in Catholic Church calls for elimination for all forms of discrimination and this is not limited to sex. The work of a pastor is to serve the people of God and it has nothing to do with gender, marital status or sexual orientation. It should also be known that women were prominent leaders in Jesus’ ministry because in all the four gospels some women like Mary the Magdalene was the first witness about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Bible also depict women as prominent leaders in the early Church, archeological discoveries provides sufficient evidence indicating that women served as deacons, priests and Bishops in early Christianity. The fact is God created men and women in his own image so that they both represent Christ as well (Genesis 1:27).

CONCLUSION

Recruitment of PCEA members in the ordination to the Holy ministry for the last three cohorts were as follows : In 2015, the ratio of women to men who were recruited in the holy ministry was , 15% : 85% ., in 2019 there were 19% : 81% while the 2022 intake was 24% : 76% . These three intakes showed an upward trajectory departing from the culture of taking few females in the ordination. However there is the need of the percentage of women intake against men to be increased through

an affirmative action. The Holy Spirit distributes different gifts to both men and women and so there is no justice to block women from getting ordained. Throughout the Bible we can see God using women in leadership, consider Miriam the sister of Moses and Debora who was one of the Israelites Judges. Apostle Paul refer to a woman called Phoebe as a servant, this word when translated in Greek is diakonos meaning a minister, and so the minister of the Gospel (Romans 16:1). Paul also referred to another woman leader called Junias as an outstanding among the Apostles (Romans 16:7). God has used women as prophets as well: Consider Anna whom God used to announce the arrival of the Messiah when the baby Jesus was brought to the Temple, Prophet Huldah who verified that the scroll of the Law found in the Temple was God's word and helped to spark the great religious reform in the days of Josiah. Isaiah described his wife as a prophet while Phillip's four daughters were all prophets (Acts 21:8 – 9). Another two women who were effective in the apostles period were Pricilla and Aquila who were co-workers with apostle Paul, they help Paul to plant Church in Ephesus and Rome and Paul expressed great confidence in their Leadership skills and considered them as the most trusted co-workers (Acts 16:26). Several women have been mentioned as heroes of faith in the Book of Hebrews (Hebrew 11:1—39). Jesus overcame incredible cultural barrier by breaking taboos for centuries when he used the Samaritan woman as evangelist to carry the good news outside the Jews Culture (John 4:1-20). All people are equal in the

eyes of God whether male, female, Gentile/Jews slaves or free and so the ministry of women is in exception (Galatians 3 : 28).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, discussions and conclusion of this study, the researcher of this study recommends the following:

- The PCEA Church to apply affirmative action when recruiting members to the holy ordained ministry, this is because there was not a single retired female clergy in both Central and Eastern regions by the time this study was being carried. Women were crucial in the growth of early church. This should be implemented at national level by the training committee.
- There is need of gender mainstreaming and gender inclusive policies from the highest office to the lowest office in the local church, this means that there is no single gender that can dominate any office, This means that a mechanism should be formulated where at least one position should be reserved for a female clergy in the office of PCEA General Assembly.
- All Church group committees should be well represented by both gender at all levels, this should be implemented from the congregation level upward.

Recommendation for further studies

A study should be carried to find out factors that hinder men attending and even participating in church activities compared with women at the congregational level.

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