

The launch of “Anglican Women on Church and Mission book.”

Dear sisters.

Grace and peace to you my sisters and all those who have graced this occasion. Congratulations to you all and for CDSP thank you for giving us the space to celebrate our achievements and to tell our story in Theological Education and Ministry anew. I am sorry I am not able to be with you however it would take many letters of justification to travel to the United States during this time especially when there is a good excuse to isolate and name us on the Ebola outbreak. Despite this we continue to be a place in which imported theology, which does not affirm women’s ministry, is at play with patriarchal culture in our context. The celebration is a concerted effort by us all to name and say no to all the theologies of exclusion and disaffirmation of life as given to us by God. The celebration is a space for us to tell of the wonderful things God has done despite the human efforts to make women fail. I am so happy to be part and parcel of the celebration where we remember.

The news of the launch of our book “Anglican Women on Church and Mission”, made me go down memory lane of my own study of theology, of meeting with my sister Jenny Te Paa Daniel (famous for naming ‘tribalism’ as the single most potent obstacle to minority women accessing and achieving in theological education) and journeying together and eventually meeting many more sisters and to just name a few of you with whom we worked closely in the formation of the Global Anglican Theological Academy (GATA) Judith Berling, Pui Lan and Bev Haddad. You and many more have been of encouragement and support to me and to all the women who have been theologically trained over the past fifteen years in my context and continue to serve in the different parts of the Anglican Communion. Our journeys in Theological Education and in the ministry of the church have been many and full of challenges and opportunities.

Personally when I told my family I was going to study Theology, my father was shocked and he tried to talk me out of it. When he realized I was not hearing him, he appealed to other family members to advise me against this move. My grandmother supported my decision, saying that I was going to study a noble subject. She however warned me using the phrase ‘remember studying theology is going to a place of **“jackets and not dresses.”**’ I did not understand that phrase until I began studying and when I began to serve in the church.

As one of the pioneers St. Paul’s United Theological College (now St. Paul’s University), I struggled hoping that it would be better after completion. After completing my studies, I was posted to teach at a Bible school, which was one of the places where lay and theologically trained women were posted if they did not land in managing a bookshop and or a Sunday school desk of the diocese. That is how I became an ardent supporter of theological Education.

My posting was not without challenges, as some of the students did object to being taught by a woman and some of my colleagues thought this was a backdoor to women seeking ordination, which they did not approve of. As a new lecturer I was assigned two courses to begin with and these were the Gospel according to St. Luke and teaching Sunday school.

The two courses were important for me because they helped me bring to light the voices of those who are in the center of the ministry of Jesus and who were also majority in the congregations. As well as teaching

in the classes, I accompanied the students to their Sunday placements to hear them teach Sunday school classes and also take services as part of their training.

While teaching at the Bible school, I together with some Church Army sisters, decided to bring the motion on the ordination of women to the floor of the Synod, as each Diocese in the then Church of the Province of Kenya was allowed to do. The motion was taken and the discussions on the ordination of women began. It took nearly twenty years before the first women were ordained in my diocese and it was not I. I was glad that all the women ordained were theologically trained and some of them today hold senior posts in the Diocese and others have continued with the studies, one of whom we are mentoring as she works through a PHD.

But how could I ask for the ordination of women without having women theologically trained. I had seen a practice of ordination without training in some parts of the province and sometimes after ordination the men were then sent for training. This is not what I wished to see for anyone but especially for women. After a few discussions the Bible school admitted two women students, but like me in my training days they had no proper accommodation. They moved between my house and the place that was being prepared for them. They were finally housed and completed their training with many challenges due to the patriarchal context.

My attempt to do a PhD took a long while but when I finally got the opportunity and completed my studies I was encouraged to continue to serve the church. I was hired to teach at the then St. Paul's United Theological College as a lecturer in History. Together with teaching I was appointed to act as Academic Dean, a post that raised many questions because I was female and lay, and no woman had ever been appointed to such a post. How would I serve in this position? And what would they call me? I received names from Sister Dean, Mrs. Dean, and Mother Dean etc. I was not sure why they would not call me Dr. Mombo, the Academic Dean, but there are always the politics of naming as a name is not just for identification but also the power with which it comes.

While a name was being sorted among my students and my colleagues, I was busy asking myself why there were more men and so few women studying theology to serve in the churches which were full of women and children. The reasons as I researched included the gendered nature of Theological Education, which made it a club of men with a few women who were tokens. The gendered nature of theological Education was supported by first, the way Scripture had been interpreted and some forms of traditional Kenyan cultures had been used to deny women entry into Theological Colleges. Second it was the link between Theological Education and ordination, which barred women at a time when dioceses were still debating on whether to accept women or not into ordained ministry.

For these reasons women remained on the periphery of Theological Education but they were engaged in service roles rather than in leadership roles. In order to open the doors for more women to be theologically trained, I was involved in a process of engendering Theological Education.

Engendering theological education took different forms, including re-interpretation of scriptures and the de-linking of theological education from ordination, to make it easier for women to access it.

Before this it was difficult for female candidates to face training committees, and defend their call to ministry, as they were judged in accordance to their social location and or marital status. This affected women across the board in different ways. Those who were married had to justify their calling in regard to the position of their husbands and whether they had approval to study theology for ordination. Those who were single were equally disadvantaged because the boards feared they would be married off during their training thus the sending churches would lose out. Those who were single mothers did not have a

chance because of the social stigma placed on them by the society in general but especially the church. The widows were not in any better situation because of the social stigma on them as well. The underlying factors for all this was the fear of female sexuality within the patriarchal society, where women were perceived as morally weak and as those who wield the power to lure men into sin. Bringing them to 'holy ground' or male space in the study of theology would contaminate the space.

Although the gates were opened for all to study theology, the women still faced the challenge of funding, as most of them had no resources to fund their studies and churches could still not invest in them. Even if I was for the increase of theologically trained women, how could it be financially realized unless I made appeals to sisters across the communion?

It is in this context that I met with my sister Jenny Te Paa Daniel first in a consultation that had brought together women in leadership in Theological Education. Although the World Council of Churches organized this consultation, the numbers were few and it confirmed my fears about increasing women in Theological Education. Meeting with Jenny, I met a sister who was equally concerned with Theological Education and passionate about women. Our meeting led us to begin conversations on how to raise future women leaders in our provinces and later the communion.

Our story in Theological Education is a book project, which will be launched in the near future, but together, with Jenny we sought ways of increasing the number of theologically trained women but calling for a theologically trained leadership for the church. We sought for ways of convincing church leadership to sign forms for financial support for women but when they did not sign the papers and time was against us, we sought for other creative ways of assisting our sisters to get the financial assistance they needed for studying.

With my sister Jenny, the journey of theological Education saw us travel to many places of the Anglican Communion challenging and speaking against what Jenny has rightly named as "Tribalism" a source of many of the challenges faced in the communion today.

The experiences of those journeys are also a book project in itself. There were joyous and painful moments, be it carrying a heavy suitcases in the London underground, or having to justify why I was travelling so much out of my workstation. As a laywoman what would I achieve?

This for me were some of the many challenges that women face in Theological Education and ministry as my colleague Helen and I have pointed out in a Book ***"If You Have No Voice Just Sing, Narratives of Women's lives and Theological Education at St. Paul's University"***

The formation of (GATA) was not only timely but it was a climax for many dreams not only of me but of other sisters as well. The meetings in Canterbury helped me to see that our ministry in Theological Education was not in vain. In the second Canterbury meeting, the presence of many and good young women in Theological Education and Ministry was both encouraging and affirming. Seeing and hearing the young women lead worship and use the song "There is a line of women extending from Eve" was proof that we have added to the line of women. From my own country the presence of Rev. Irene Ayallo, now Rev. Dr. Irene Ayallo and Rev. Mary Tororeiy completing her PhD in Lutheran Seminary in Chicago, known to some of you. This is beside those who are teaching in the faculties of theology or in the ministry of the church.

Like the Prophet Ann in the Gospel of St. Luke, I can only thank God for the opportunity and privilege to serve in this particular way and in context.

As we launch this book let me share with you that in June 2014, the women in Kenya from different churches celebrated over thirty years of the first ordinations. It was a time to share the milestones that women had made in the ministry but also to hear the challenges they still face within the patriarchal church. From some of the stories one would see that while we had moved on, there was still a spirit of resistance to women's leadership. Not long after the celebration we got the news that women in the Anglican Church had to wait for five more years to be elected as bishops.

Why is this the case when some Dioceses from my Province were among the first ones to ordain women? Using the hermeneutics of suspicion I can observe that the spirit of "tribalism" is at work and the voices we hear are those that appear to be regressing in as far as the ministry of women is concerned. But this will not stop the spirit of God moving, and as was told to us in Kenya during our celebration and I now end this letter with the same words: "the Spirit cannot be silenced. She blows where she wants, breaking down barriers of patriarchy, tribalism and empire. You are a living example that the Spirit empowers women of any age, nationality to serve as leaders in the church."

I wish you all a memorable celebration and pray that our work continues to be reflected among those who carry on the ministry.

Your sister in ministry

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