

Research Article

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Pastoral communication in the Local church in Nigeria: From planning to execution

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Abstract: Planning is at the heart of every good human endeavour. In the Catholic Church, Pastoral Planning is a key ingredient of Pastoral Communication. The purpose/objective of the paper was to investigate the place of Pastoral Communication in the life of the Church in Bauchi Diocese, Nigeria. Leaning on the interaction theory, this paper which employed the qualitative method of study found that a well grounded Pastoral Communication would facilitate active participation of everyone one in the evangelizing mission of the Local Church. It recommended harnessing communication media and human communication as well as ensuring feedback mechanism and periodic evaluation as practical ways of revamping Pastoral Communication in Bauchi Diocese and the Church in the Nigeria. It concluded that Pastoral Communication creates image

makers for the Church in Bauchi and the country at large.

Keywords – Bauchi diocese, Catholic bishops' conference of Nigeria, Pastoral communication, Pastoral planning

1. INTRODUCTION/ PROBLEM STATEMENT

Jesus Christ commissioned his apostles to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:16-20). The Great Commission obliges the Church to use every possible means, from the all-important personal witness to the most sophisticated satellite links to communicate the one saving truth, Jesus Christ (Foley, 1998, p.6). In is in this light that the Universal Church has continued to emphasize the need for all dioceses and Episcopal Conferences to formulate pastoral communication plans to guide the work of evangelization (*Aetatis Novae* par. 17; *Inter Mirifica* par. 21; *Communio et Progressio* pars. 162, 165 & 172; *Redemptoris Missio* par. 37c).

This pastoral plan for communication in particular Churches has to key into the Church's universal vision of communication namely, "communication that creates community through dialogue and giving of oneself in love" (*Communio et progressio* par. 2). This study is a working-document (theoretical paper) which sets the parameters for an effective and efficient structure of Pastoral Communication in Bauchi Diocese, Nigeria. It takes into cognizance the kind of communication most appropriate to the diocese, its vision and mission statements, objectives and goals actions and resources. It aspires to serve as a reference material for the Communication Apostolate in Nigeria through the diocesan bishop to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN).

2. DECONSTRUCTION OF CONCEPTS

The terms to be clarified namely, pastoral, planning and pastoral planning will be deconstructed as they apply to this paper:

- i. **Pastoral:** Pastoral means the missionary mandate entrusted to pastors of souls to take care of God's flock. This mandate includes, preaching, teaching, governing and sanctifying the people of God.
- ii. **Planning:** Planning involves the painstaking decision of organising and arranging what needs to be done now, midterm or in the long run. It has to do with setting up goals, visions and a mission and laying the parameters for achieving such. It could be in the church or any other organisation.

Pastoral planning: Pastoral planning has to do with laying a framework of pastoral activities or a blueprint for the local church in such a way that the clergy, religious and laity know exactly what to do, why they are doing it, where to do it, when to do it and how those activities need to be executed. Pastoral planning creates a platform for role identification and synergy which is backed by a solid groundwork that has been laid out in black and white.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OR METHODS

This is a qualitative paper which employs narrative literature review of major extant documents of the Church concerning social/pastoral communication which are relevant to the subject being reviewed. The researcher sourced materials from the internet using Google search. These materials were reviewed and interpreted in the light of the context of the study being Bauchi Diocese.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK/CONTEXT

The theoretical framework for this study is the "interaction theory." The "interaction theory" is based on G.H. Mead's symbolic interaction. Writing on this theory, Eilers proposed that we should not only concentrate on what happens between the Sender and the Receiver but that we also consider the whole communication process. Just as Hydrogen and Oxygen become water (H₂O) only when they are together so also in the communication process, something happens which is different from the single participant in the process be it Sender or Receiver (1994: 22-23).

The "interaction theory" is appropriate to this study because it has to do with participation communication. According to Olusola (2013, p. 79) this interactive and participatory kind of communication that creates community is realizable in Small Christian Communities (SCCS) where the faithful recognize themselves as the body of Christ that are nurtured to grow through active participation of each one in the Church's mission of evangelisation.

The context of this pastoral plan is Bauchi diocese. A diocese is a corporate body and a small organization with certain communication structures and means, which have to be responded to. As an organization, a diocese has a management structure that determines relationships between the different activities and the members in that roles and responsibilities are assigned and subdivided by a competent ecclesiastical authority. Therefore, all rules and experiences of "corporate" and "organizational communication" also apply to a diocese.

Geographically, Bauchi diocese covers Bauchi and Gombe States in the North-eastern region of Nigeria. The official erection of Bauchi as an Apostolic Vicariate took place on November 7, 1996 with Bishop John Moore SMA as its first Apostolic Vicar. In 2003, Bauchi became a full-fledged Diocese with all rights and privileges. Currently, it is a suffragan of Jos Archdiocese. The diocese is bounded by Jos Archdiocese to the West, Kano Diocese to the North, Kafanchan Diocese to the North-West, Maiduguri and Yola Dioceses in the East and Jalingo Diocese to the South.

5. LITERATURE SURVEY, DATA ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1. Participatory communication as a prototype of pastoral planning in the Bauch Diocese

Participatory communication involves sender and receiver exchanges and interaction between two or more persons through various available means of communication. For Servaes, "there are two major approaches to participatory communication. The first is the dialogical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, and the second involves the ideas of access, participation and self- management..." (Jacobson & White, 1996: 17). Eilers (1994: 22-23) holds that the participatory model of communication does not so much consider the sender anymore, nor does his or her expectations and interests but tries to see the sender and receiver on the same level and considers the communication process as happening between equals.

Paulo Freire proposed facilitation, reflection and participation in community. This involves praxis and dialogic action-meaning, a combination of action and reflection. A circular process of reflection-action-reflection through participation process. It will entail, see, judge and act. This is akin to Martin Buber's participation as espoused in his book *I and thou* (Buber, 1958).

Eilers (1994) cited Everett Rogers and Lawrence Kincaid's as saying that in communication, the convergence model is a process which enables participants create and share information with each other towards reaching an agreeable understanding. This perspective views communication as a reoccurring mutual process of sharing information between two or more people. Communication is no longer viewed as a one-way and top-bottom affair but as being horizontal between the participants. The more participants A and B converge the more mutual understanding is reached, the more communication takes place. There is an area of mutual understanding which is the convergence reached in a communication process (Eilers, 1994: 22-23).

So, participatory communication is the prototype model of pastoral planning in Bauchi Diocese. This involves the bishop, priests, religious and laity as well as the communication, liturgical, education, youth, catechetical commissions in the diocese forming a synergy. At the parish level, the formation and sustenance of the Small Christian Communities (SCCS) is sacrosanct.

It is expected that communication flow according to responsibilities. This should start with the Bishop, priests, heads of the different diocesan departments, the parish councils and parish organizations. It is important to note that the communication flow in the diocese is supposed to be horizontal, involving everybody in a similar sense of responsibility rather than linear. Instead of practicing linear communication (Faniran (2014: 60)), it is expected that everyone cues into the participatory approach since communicators are partners not subordinates (Eilers, 2003: 105).

5.2. Mission and vision statement

(i) Mission Statement: Like vision statements, mission statements are futuristic. It is a more concrete and definite action compared to vision statement. While vision statement inspires people to dream big, mission statement motivates them to act. The mission statements are concise and outcome-oriented. They explain the basic outcomes a diocese is working to achieve. They are equally inclusive because they involve all sectors in the project (Lord, 1989: 49).

Stonich maintains that vision statements constitute short phrases/sentences which communicates an organization's hope for the future and so should (1) be understood and shared by members of an organization; (2) be broad enough to include a diverse variety of local perspectives, (3) and be easy to communicate (1982: 27).

It was Pope Paul VI who said, "... evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize..." (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, par. 14). This means that the Church exists to evangelize. As such, every mission statement has to reflect this. I, therefore, propose that the communication mission statement for Bauchi diocese should be, communicating the mission of Christ through dialogical communication and faith-sharing in the various organs of the diocese.

(ii) **Vision Statement:** A vision statement answers the question: Why does an organization exist? What are you doing as an organization? Who are we serving? What is the purpose of the existence of the organization? (Stonich, 1982: 26). Accordingly, Ward and Griffiths opine that a vision statement “helps the individuals within an organisation to get rid of a fractured view, to see it as a whole and to have a picture of what the organisation is and where it is heading to. It helps these individuals to understand where they fit into the organisation and to identify themselves with it (Sunderaj, 1998: 163).

This shows that vision statements are aspirational, motivational and they look into the future. They help an organisation to clarify its beliefs and governing principles to its members. Therefore, I propose that the vision statement of Bauchi diocesan communication should be to bring about a participatory and interactive Church by having all Catholics key into the evangelizing mission of the Church.

6. OBJECTIVES AND GOALS OF DIOCESAN COMMUNICATION

I. Objectives: The objectives of Bauchi Diocesan communication are anchored on enhancing faith-sharing through human communication and various means of social communication. This includes:

a. Using the media for evangelization: This has to do with mission within the Church and mission outside the Church. In *Inter Mirifica*, par. 3, Vatican Council II emphatically states: “It is the Church’s birthright to use and own any of these media which are necessary or useful for the formation of Christians and for pastoral activity.” In his Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Paul VI upheld the teaching that: “The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilise these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect. It is through these that she proclaims ‘from the housetops’ the message of which she is the depository. In them she finds a modern and effective version of the pulpit. Thanks to them, she succeeds in speaking to the multitudes” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, par. 45).

b. Educating/training the faithful in the use of the media: The Church has to “form a correct conscience on the use of the media” (*Inter Mirifica*, par. 5). The encyclical letter, *Vigilanti Cura* of Pope Pius XI in 1936 being the first modern document of the 20th century exclusively devoted to film demonstrates that. Therein, the Holy Father promotes the principles and membership of the “Legion of Decency” concerned with the moral values of films. The document repeatedly calls for morality in the media hence, the need for media education.

c. Communicating culture through evangelisation: Pope John Paul II’s encyclical letter on mission *Redemptoris Missio* provides an additional approach to the objective of modern communication. It specifically noted the role of communication and culture in relation to religion as can be seen in the following:

i. Media training for culture: Modern people individually and as groups are “formed” by the means of communication. Modern communication creates a new culture. Culture here refers to the ways of thinking, behaviour and relationships of the people. Notably, “in particular, the younger generation is growing up in a world conditioned by the Mass Media.” (No. 37).

ii. Upholding the “authentic culture” of the people: Beside this, there is, however, a culture of people as the basis of society. In the Pope’s view, it is the role and responsibility of the Church to defend the “authentic culture” of people. But how can such “authentic culture” be determined and defined? It probably leads to defending human rights and the moral integrity of the individual and society as was already expressed in the past but more from the moral perspective.

iii. Exploring new ways of communicating: There is another dimension, a *deeper reality* that is not determined by the content of communication alone but by “new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology.” In this way the Church sees herself confronted with a new “audience which is more determined by the means of social communication than traditions (Eilers, 2003: 49-51).

II. Goals: The goal of diocesan communication in Bauchi diocese is to form a participatory church built around Christ the head through the animation of the Holy Spirit. Other goals framed around this include:

Empowering and encouraging the faithful to be productive at parish and diocesan levels.

Strategizing and regularizing the use of current (Sunderaj, 1998: 166) media technologies like both old and new media platforms for faith sharing in the diocese.

The use of electronic media to engage other believers in a public dialogue on faith for the sake of building communication (Sunderaj, 1998: 167) beyond the shores of the diocese.

7. ACTION AND PROJECT

Here, we are concerned with bringing our concrete actions and projects to be realised. These are:

- a) Forming a synergy among all the various commissions in the diocese.
- b) Ensuring that every parish has a blog, a Facebook page and twitter account which are keyed into the diocesan website for easy access to information.
- c) Making sure that every parish has a functional communications committee which supplies the Diocesan Directorate of Social Communications with updates from parishes.
- d) Formation and maintenance of Small Christian Communities in all parishes.
- e) Encouraging and supporting pastoral priorities of all ministries in the diocese including the youths, family, statutory bodies and associations in a way that diffuses the tension between the clergy and the laity.
- f) Getting audiences for the media and multiplying the effectiveness of pastoral communication.
- g) Providing media services for the Church through organizing ecclesiastical media as well as enhancing the presence of the Church's activities in the public media especially television and radio.
- h) Training and retraining for catholic media workers who are members of the following media organisations - Catholic Media Professionals Association (CAMPASS), Catholic Artistes and Entertainers Association of Nigeria (CAEAN) (Iorpuu, 2011: 10) and SIGNIS Nigeria through provision of skill acquisition, training, workshop, seminar for workers in the diocesan directorate as well as retreat for all media practitioners in the diocese.
- i) Periodic or quarterly reports of all actions and projects for evaluation since the time frame for execution is two years.
- j) Organizing a diocesan synod after every five or ten years to get feedback as well as access and evaluate all areas of the diocese.

8. INVENTORY OR ASSESSMENT OF EXTANT COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT

Our task here is to identify what is already in practice in the diocese. These include:

- a) The directorate of social communications is in place in the diocese. The communications commission is headed by a priest and has a layman as chairman.
- b) The directorate has a functional newspaper called *Bauchi Caritas* which is published fortnightly. The paper publishes news from within and outside the diocese. It goes for N100 and is funded by the office from sales of the previous edition. About 500 to 600 copies are usually printed and sold with few leftovers.

In the past, the communications office organised radio and television programmes but that has stopped now. The communications office is also saddled with the responsibility of handling communications-related programmes at ordinations and anniversaries. The office produces billboards and banners for such events. Also, the office prints and sales souvenirs for the diocese at such important functions. The office is expected to make financial gains and make returns to the diocese since it is the diocese that gives money for such.

9. SOCIO-RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE OF COMMUNICATION

The point has already been made that the communication, liturgical, education, youth, catechetical commissions in the diocese need to work towards a common goal. By forming a synergy, these commissions would not work as separate entities but would operate as the various organs of one body, the Local Church in Bauchi.

This is only possible when a structure, covering all aspects of communication both social and religious is put in place. That structure is a vibrant and dynamic directorate of social communications which is the eye of the diocese to the world. As the mouth piece of the diocese and the instrument of public relations, it is the responsibility of the secretariat of social communication to coordinate the various organs of the diocese as well as ensure information flow.

This entails engaging the secular media and “marketing” the Church to the outside world. In this respect, the communications office shall harness diocesan activities, engage the secular press, welcome and train ecclesiastical media practitioners and revamp the extant communication structure in the diocese for efficiency and proficiency.

10. MEDIA EDUCATION

The words “nowhere today are people untouched by the impact of media upon religious and moral attitudes, political and social systems, and education” (*Aetatis Novae* par. 1) are apt to media education. Importantly too, since Pope Pius XI his 1936 encyclical letter, *Vigilanti Cura* earlier made a case for media education, the Church in Bauchi diocese has no option that to key into this call by the Holy Father. Understandably, “in an era of evangelization, the means of social communication have become so important as to be for many the chief means of information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their behaviour, families and within society at large” (*Ecclesia in Asia* par. 48). The low literacy level of the North-Eastern region particularly Bauchi State makes this a must urgent need. As far as media education is concerned, the Church in Bauchi should organise/establish:

- a) Workshops, seminars and refresher courses for members of parish communication’s committee as well as diocesan media workers as part of media education.
- b) Experts from secular media to train and update diocesan media workers.
- c) Seminars and workers for priests and religious in the rudiments of Information and Communication Technologies, ITC and how to minister in a digital world.
- d) Know-your-faith programmes and catechism lessons be taught with the aid of power point for easy grasp.
- e) Events aimed at promoting catholic culture which includes promotion of Catholic Action, the arts, literature, theatre/drama and music should be promoted in all catholic schools within the diocese.
- f) A Centre for Entrepreneurial Journalism in the diocese to train young people especially those who cannot afford tuition fee in tertiary institutions in the rudiments of news gathering, processing and dissemination as well as photography and video coverage.

11. PASTORAL OUTREACH TO AND DIALOGUE WITH MEDIA PRACTITIONERS

Earlier, the point was made about forming associations like CAMPASS and CEAN in Bauchi diocese. This will prepare the ground for any kind of outreach with them. By the time they come together, the media practitioners would better express their faith, synergise and also offer useful support to the directorate of social communications in the diocese. This outreach will include inviting them on World Communications Sunday for the celebration. On this day, the plan is to let them reflect on the message of the Holy Father and remind them about the invaluable role of the media in the world.

The diocesan directorate would organise retreat for all media practitioners in the diocese as a way of reminding them about the importance of their faith amidst the vicissitudes of their profession. Such days would be moments of encountering one another and interaction between our diocesan media staff and secular media workers.

12. FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND EVALUATION

For any human endeavour to succeed, resources have to be adequately harnessed for the smooth implementation of whatever has been planned. To achieve a successful pastoral plan for communication in Bauchi diocese, financial support and evaluation ought to be in place through:

- a) Sourcing for finances through canvassing for donations or grants from foreign donor agencies.
- b) Appealing for local support from parishes for the directorate of social communication.
- c) Sourcing for funds for television and radio programmes as well newspaper production through advertisements and promotions.
- d) Getting benefactors and benefactresses from among the laity who would be glad to support either televangelism, radio or print media evangelisation.
- e) Sales of the diocesan newspaper, *Bauchi Caritas*.

By way of evaluation, we have seen that a diocese is the people of God building a community which is visible in its members as well as in their activities through a diocesan bishop. Like any other organization, with its structures, people and goals, what applies to Bauchi diocese may not be applicable in another diocese. With that in mind, the principles of good organizational communication should be sought and applied as its denominating factor to move the diocese forward.

Concretely, there should be formative evaluation of all laid down plans. This means organizing and reorganizing the strategies at the planning stage. This touches on ongoing and final evaluation. The ongoing evaluation has to do with indicators or criteria which enable the organisation to know it is meeting its needs and it is right on course in achieving those goals and objectives. The summative evaluation is the final stage which entails general assessment of the whole process at the end. The onus lies on the diocesan bishop and the director of social communications to ensure an annual or continual assessment of the effectiveness of Church/diocesan media.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to achieve the desired pastoral plan for social communication in Bauchi diocese, the following recommendations are necessary:

- a) **Enforcing participatory communication:** Rather than taking to linear communication, participatory model of communication which gives everybody a sense of belonging and the opportunity to make his or her own contribution to the growth and development of the diocese should be put in place.
- b) **Making the mission statement come alive:** The mission statement namely, communicating the mission of Christ through dialogical communication and faith-sharing in the various organs of the diocese should come alive.
- c) **Fulfilling the vision statement:** Working to bring about a participatory and interactive Church by having all Catholics key into the evangelizing mission of the Church, being the vision statement ought to be given a huge priority in the diocese.
- d) **Harnessing communication media and human communication:** There should be a synergy between the media of social communication and human communication. The use of the media for interaction and evangelization should be without prejudice to the formation and sustenance of Small Christian Communities in the diocese.
- e) **Feedback mechanism and periodic evaluation:** Feedback mechanisms should be put in place like fora were priests, religious and laity can air their opinions about what is happening in their parishes or in the diocese;

suggestion boxes should be provided in every parish and the Cathedral, being the diocesan headquarters. There should be periodic review or evaluation of all goals, objectives, mission and vision.

14. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS/CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper implies at the heart of the Church is pastoral communication. It argues that communication makes for the smooth running of the Church even as it leads to active participation and ultimately, salvation. Although this is a conceptual paper, it has contributed significantly by providing resources materials for the Catholic Church in Nigeria. The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria through the Catholic Secretariate of Nigeria can leverage on this paper for policy direction in terms of a roadmap for pastoral communication in the Church. The research hopes that experiential studies of how pastoral communication is practically impacting on the Church should be written in the near future to compliment this study.

15. CONCLUSION

As a working document for planning pastoral community in Bauchi diocese, the study has proposed participatory communication as a prototype for communications in the diocese. We saw that this entails harnessing both the media of social communication and human communication in the Church's mission of evangelisation. With the desired recommendations in place, the contents of the study made herein are meant to map out the modality for the practical presentation of a working document for pastoral communication to the diocesan bishop and subsequently to the CBCN.

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