The Impact, Benefits and Challenges of Foreign Missions to the Diocese of Niger Delta North, Anglican Communion

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Abstract

The great commission of Jesus Christ and mandate to every believer in Jesus Christ is to participate in the preaching, teaching and spreading of the gospel of Christ commonly referred to as mission. The impacts and contributions of the Diocese of Niger Delta North on foreign Christian missions are quite enormous especially in the areas of good and standard moral values, social behavioral change and education. The benefits of Foreign Missions are applicable to missionaries, the host community and the local Church which is the sender. However, mission works are not without challenges and most of them are similar to each other directly or indirectly, irrespective of the country of the operation, ranging from human (missionary), material to environmental. These are the issues examined, with the use published books, journals, internet materials and reports including interviews, personal experiences and observation.

Key words: Church, Missions, Evangelism, Great Commission

Introduction

Mission is one of the greatest concerns to God, hence it is described as the heartbeat of God. The plan of God for creation is inexplicably emboldened in the scripture and the Church has been divinely sent to the nations of the World as agent of salvation according to Matthew chapter 28 verses18-20. God's missionary mandate is ultimately grounded in the eternal love of God. According to Ottih, (2006); "The Church on earth is by her nature missionary, since according to the plan of the Father, she has as, her origin, the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit". For Charles (2005), mission to the church is the reason for being. This is because, mission is the post resurrection command of Jesus Christ to His disciples as recorded in the gospel". Right from its creation, the Diocese of Niger Delta North did not relent from the burden and responsibility placed on her as a mission oriented Diocese. The Pontiffs whom the Episcopal and apostolic mantle of leadership of the Diocese rest upon carried this responsibility with utmost passion, commitment and dedication.

Concept of Mission

The word mission has multiplicity of application. Thus, soldiers, terrorists, diplomats, military officers are said to be on mission at one point or the other. It follows that Mission can be described or seen as the act of sending someone or group of persons to perform some specific task or assignments. In the context of this paper however, mission refers to Christian mission. According to Bowen (1996), *the word mission expresses the idea of movement, because it is all about sending and being sent. As the father sent me, so I send you said Jesus* (p.1). The call and mandate to every believer in Jesus Christ to participate in the spreading of the gospel of Christ and good news about Jesus Christ is referred to mission. By implication, the supreme task of the Church is to evangelise the world; hence, a missionary is someone who is sent out with a message.

When the word was first used to refer to the act of sending is traceable to the 16th century when the Jesuits, a Catholic sect, began to use it in the sense of the spread of the Gospel among people of other faiths. With the expansion of the Western World into the rest of the world, the term mission was popularized. Furthermore, the noun mission has its roots in the notion of sending, and derives particularly

from the New Testament use of the Greek verb ἀποστέλλω via the Latin *mitto*. Over recent centuries it has thus been understood to refer to the *sending* of the church into the world to make disciples of Jesus Christ-the human dimension of the mission of the triune God.

However, perhaps ambiguity in the meaning of "mission" may not matter so much. What is important is not precise definition of the term, but informed and biblical reflection on the various dimensions of Christian activity and ministry to which it might refer. Substance is far more important than the words used to represent it. Nevertheless, it does still matter in that confusion over the meaning of words is likely to produce uncertainty about such questions of substance as well. In this case there is agreement about the central importance of mission and the obligation under which it places Churches and individual Christians. Brunner (1965) observed that *the Church exists for mission as a fire exists for burning. Where there is no mission, there is no church* (p. 108).

We allude therefore that Christian mission involves the Church crossing frontiers or barriers which could be linguistic, economic, cultural, or religious. Secondly, there must be some communication of the message of Christ. Thus, mission involves sending, crossing of boundaries of faith or belief and communicating the salvific message of the gospel. Furthermore, mission may be widely describes as conversion, Church planting, enculturation and dialogue, service of God's reign, ecumenical dialogue and contextual theologies. Certain issues are germane in the description of Christian mission, namely, proclamation, evangelization and contextual theologies. These three elements work together b giving a clear dimension to the goal of Christian mission which is church birth. Christian mission or missions, therefore means evangelism that takes the gospel across ethnic, linguistic and geographic boundaries that gathers people, Churches and teaches them to obey everything that Jesus commanded.

The fact that the word is not a biblical one makes it difficult to define on exegetical grounds. It is argued though that this could not become an issue just as incarnation and Trinity are not biblical words but have wide consensus regarding their respective meaning. Of course the noun has its roots in the notion of sending and

derives particularly from the New Testament use of the Greek verb *ἀποστέλλω* via the Latin *mitto*. Over recent centuries it has thus been understood to refer to the *sending* of the church into the world to make disciples of Jesus Christ—the human dimension of the mission of the triune God. It is for his cause that Yakela (2009) noted that in recent years, the word 'mission' has had legions of definitions by theologians and mission practitioners. For him, mission is the proclamation of the gospel to all nations so that the end may come. Also Roman Catholics, (cited in Yakela, 2009) indicate mission as the planting of Churches in every country and among every people.

The obvious fact from the discourse above is that Churches, people and organizations have done mission differently. Some see it in terms of pastoral care, evangelism, teaching, healthcare, social welfare, education, etc. However, in the context of his study, mission refers to specific works of the Church and organizations in the task of reaching people for Christ.

Furthermore, another interesting development in the study and practice of mission is the all-embracing approach in what is known as Holistic Mission. By this we mean mission that takes into account the whole of human needs: spiritual, social and personal such as church planting, development and social transformation.

Described as activity of the heart, there are numerous scriptural references about the human heart. However, the nexus of all the references seems to be that the heart controls the activities of men in matters of speech (Luke 6:45), faith (Romans 10:10), character (Proverbs 23:7), Life (Proverbs 4:23), breed of evil (Mark 7:21), etc. This does not mean that man is a helpless victim of heart; rather we control our heart as much as the heart controls us. "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life." (Proverbs 4:23). More so, taking cognizance of the references, it is therefore congruous to say that when the word 'mission' becomes a principal vocabulary for a man, that man has got a mission heart. Yakela: 2009 says:

> A mission heart is thus a heart that yearns to see people reached with the gospel of Christ. It is a heart that rejoices when a soul is saved. A mission heart is heart that bemoans the state of moral

> depravity and decadence that has so much characterized our private and public lives. A mission heart is heart that drives mission (pg. 12).

The Impacts of Christian Foreign Missions

Does religion do better or more harm to the society? This question has been a subject of intense debate for centuries. However in this study, we endeavoured to weigh positive sides of impacts of Christianity and Christian foreign mission activities of the Diocese of Niger Delta North on the people and on the society.

The primary objective of the Christian missionary activity in foreign countries is to evangelize the people, that is, to convert them from their traditional forms of religion to the Christian way of life and belief. In this, there have been successes to certain extents. The introduction of Christianity has had an almost universal good influence upon the society it is presented. For instance, in today, it is believed that lives and properties are more secure than under the traditional religion whose law of the jungle justice has been supplanted by the teaching of love of one's neighbour. This is because Christian missionaries did not confine their activity to preaching and building Churches but brought about new ways of doing things.

The impacts and contributions of the Diocese of Niger Delta North on foreign Christian missions are quite enormous especially in the areas of good and standard moral values, social behavioural change and education. However, for specificity, we classified the impacts or mission influence on the life of the people evangelized into the following categories: religious and cultural impacts, Social impacts and economic impacts. The Church has always impacted the society in many ways, not only in words but with Christian philanthropy.

Religious Impacts: The religious and cultural lives of the Ivoirians were affected by the activities of the Missionaries. This is because the Christian religious gospel comes with the complimenting western culture. On the religious impact, the traditional worship is common in African countries before the introduction of Christianity. In short terms, ancestors were revered and worshipped. Special days were set apart to worship and make sacrifices to the gods and ancestors. However,

Christianity eroded that with the emphasis that God can only be approached through Jesus Christ, and that the day of worship to the Almighty God is Sunday or Saturday for the Sabbatharians.

The Christianity as introduced also encouraged the people to call upon the Almighty God every day for protection and blessings. In course of the Christian mission works, many individuals and families surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ and jettisoned their former ways of live such idol worship, witchcraft, drunkenness, promiscuity, etc. They exchanged time for beer parlor which is common in the country to church services and programs.

Social Impacts: It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the coming of Christianity. It brought for mankind, one thing, an altogether new sense of human life. Christians teaches and showed man his soul. They taught that in the sight of God, all souls were equal, that every human life was sacrosanct and inviolate; the Christian sought out the diseased, the crippled, and the mutilated, to give them help. Christians held that God was love, it took on deep overtones of sacrifice and compassion to redeem human race. Again, the missionaries have by their teaching and activities tried to emancipate Africans, the West Africa, in Particular from the slavery of superstitions and diseases. Christian teaching has destroyed the superstitions, which propped such evil customs and practices such as human sacrifice and the murder of twins. The social life of the people is positively impacted. Among the areas of the social impact are:

a. Positive attitude toward the world.
b. Awareness of order (i.e. cause/effect, cf. Rom. 1:20).
c. Views of man as a superintendent of nature.
d. Positive attitude toward progress.

Economic Impacts: The economic impacts of Christian foreign mission works of the Diocese of Niger Delta North in Cote d'Ivoire cannot be over emphasized as they are glaring and very obvious. The positive economic impact of the mission in Cote d'Ivoire are many as Okoli, Fonana, and Nwachukwu affirms that:

> Through the mission works, many persons are engaged in the education outfit of the mission work as teachers, minders, cleaners,

> drivers, security, etc. the Church also engaged some as both clerical workers and lay workers hence providing food on their tables and meeting their financial obligations in the family. The Church through her social welfare have empowered many. (Personal Communication 2023)

Benefits of the Diocese of Niger Delta North Foreign Mission Missions (Cote d'Ivoire)

If the Priests, lay and congregations of the Lord's Church only knew of the benefits of foreign missions to the missionaries and local Church, there would be more effort to support the missions and the missionaries. The benefits and rewards outline in this study is applicable to both the missionaries and the local Church which is the sender.

The first benefit of foreign missions is that it helps the missionary and the Church to follow the Lord's directive. The Church's spiritual directive is soul-driven. God is mindful of the lost when he waits patiently and delays judgment (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:3-4). Paul was mindful of the lost in his anticipation to preach the gospel to others (Romans 1:15-16). Therefore, the Church should be mindful of the lost since the members of it are considered the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13). The Lord's directive is clearly seen in the Great Commission. Thus, foreign mission reminds the Church of Jesus' words in Matthew 28:19-20. The Limited Commission of Matthew 10 concentrated exclusively on the Jewish nation in Jesus' day. In contrast, the Great Commission directs Christians to go to the ends of earth for the cause of Christ in the present day. The Great Commission is called "great" for at least three reasons. First, it is great, because the Lord, himself, uttered those words. Second, it is great, because it is a noble calling. Third, it is great, because of the grand scope of its application. Without a global outreach, Christians are not practicing the Great Commission. Simply stated, the church's mission is the Great Commission!

The second benefit of foreign missions is that it helps the missionary and the Church find purpose in identity. The Church's unique business is people. Foreign missions help to connect saved people to lost people. Rather than focus on money,

time, success, efficiency, or social or political agendas, missionaries help people draw near to God (James 4:8). They help people in foreign lands who are outside of the body of Christ to develop and confess faith in Christ (Romans 10:9-10). For those who are already Christians in foreign lands, missionaries encourage and assist their growth in the Lord (Hebrews 5:14). Additionally, foreign missions help the Church to develop its purpose in saving souls. Everywhere Jesus went, he sought lost souls (Luke 19:10). He talked to individuals and groups. He talked to rich and poor. He talked to Jews and Gentiles. He talked to males and females. He talked to urban folks and rural folks. Indeed, he talked to everyone about God and his kingdom. From the book of Acts, one observes that the early disciples followed Jesus' example of what he did and taught (Acts 1:1). As a result, nearly every chapter speaks to the growth of disciples in some way (Acts 2:41; 4:4; etc.). In this way, foreign missions help to further connect the Church to soul-saving. Physicians heal the body; counselors restore the mind; but evangelists save the soul. There is no higher vocation than sharing the gospel with another person. Not surprisingly, the Apostle Paul wrote of evangelists' feet being beautiful (Romans 10:13-15).

The third benefit of foreign missions is that it helps members of a congregation to focus on others rather than on self. It is easy for human beings to become self-absorbed. When missionaries visit the sponsoring Church to give their reports, it can serve to remind the members of the fact that the fields are still white to harvest. An even greater reminder of this truth comes when members visit the foreign mission fields.

The fourth benefit of foreign missions is that it helps the missionary and Church reach their full potential. The foreign mission exposes the missionary to the outside world from his immediate environment and connect such to unforeseen opportunities in the ministry and otherwise.

Finally, there are several conclusions and observations that might be noticed. First, neither foreign mission work nor local work is more important than the other—both are equally important to the Church God. Second, foreign missions simply cannot exist without a healthy mission sponsor. Third, Church congregation

without foreign missions is neither light nor hope to the world beyond the immediate community and environment.

Challenges of the Foreign Missions (Cote d'Ivoire)

Generally, mission works are not without challenges and most foreign mission work challenges are similar to each other directly or indirectly, irrespective of the country of the operation.

Having returned to Nigeria from the Cote d'Ivoire mission field as a missionary Priest and a researcher, I observed several challenges that other missionaries face in course of executing their duties in the mission fields especially those working abroad. The challenges are in two categories; human (missionary) challenges and environmental challenges. Most of these challenges are common to all missionaries, but some of them are related and peculiar to the environment, especially researcher's personally encounter and findings in course of this study. Therefore, some of these challenges are penciled down to equip the intending missionaries and get them fully informed about the unique challenges that missionaries face and also for scholarship. The challenges are as follows:

i. Language Barrier

Difficulties in communication occasioned by the country's lingual Franca is a big and primary challenge of the Cote d'Ivoire mission especially when the missionary does not have the basic knowledge and understanding of French language which is the Cote d'Ivoire's official language whereas the Anglican Diocese of Niger Delta North is a Nigerian Anglican Diocese where English language is the national official language. The missionary works in such environment will progress but with slow pace until the missionary could speak the language fluently or engage a competent interpreter for the Church worship services, evangelism, visitation and other social interaction which involves buying of commodities in the market places and use of public transportation.

The researcher was a victim of this challenge of language as a foreign missionary Priest of the Anglican Diocese of Niger Delta North in Cote d'Ivoire. His first time of taking off from Nigeria to Cote d'Ivoire was greeted with the shocking change

of language to French in the air craft immediately after boarding for the flight at the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Air Port, Abuja. Nobody seems to be understanding or speaking English any longer. This challenge continued, on the arrival of the flight at Abidjan, the immigration officials started their own with a drama of "*Nous comprehend pas Anglais, ici cest Cote d'Ivoire"* meaning "we don't understand English, here is Cote d'Ivoire". At the end of the drama, the researcher was cleared. Among other language challenged the researched faced was how to communicate to commercial taxi or bus drivers this is where I am going to and the among I will pay for the fare, when you reached your bus stop, no way to inform the driver to alight the vehicle and finally how to negotiate prices of things to buy in the market places or shops.

ii. Culture and Cultural Literacy

Life in another culture is stressful. For many, just the task of getting meals prepared, clothes and dishes washed, rooms cleaned, vehicles maintained, and shopping done can take more time than is available in a day. Among the challenging aspect of the Ivoirians is their cuisine. Lots of special delicacies such as Atiake, Sauce Bistash, Futu Banan, etc. However, these delicacies distinguished them from other parts of the world.

Jaja (2015), holds that culture is a universal concept and experience. How can one define such as overwhelming aggregate of individual and collective life? It is the established pattern of behavior among a people. It is an all-embracing and heterogeneous concept that encompasses every aspect of human life and experiences. It is perceived as a way of life, or totality of all human efforts and achievements in the struggle for survival in the midst of unfriendly and militant forces of nature. Culture includes everything that makes humans what they are as well as the heritage they possess. It finds expression in their religion, language, philosophy, cuisine music, dance, drama, architecture, political organization, technology, etc. humans created the things that make up culture and they absorb these things by living within a cultural setting. Everything made by human is culture whereas everything created by God is natural.

Hence, culture implies ideas, arts and artifact, the way of understanding the environment, thought patterns, belief, morals, organization, clothing, etc. Every culture has its values. The cultural value are those things, personal qualities or actions that society approves as desirable, for its members The cultural literacy is very imperative in missions and as important as language acquisition. This is the beginning of developing cultural literacy in missions and if neglected, it may have some adverse effect on the mission works. However, the missionary has a greater task than just becoming fluent in a language. Missionaries generally needs to understand the culture to which she/he is sent.

However, the cultural values of the every nation, ethnic tribes and people generally include their national official language, dialects of their ethnic tribes or groups, food, mode of dressing, etc. This can be a lifelong task, as some cultural intricacies are known only after spending a lifetime in the culture. Sometimes, it can feel like years are being wasted.

1. Improved sponsorship

There is need to step up with the mission sponsorship in planting new Churches and crusades as this has directly and indirectly affected the growth of the Church in Cote d'Ivoire. Imagine when a missionary who receives only a stipend is placed with the responsibility of organizing crusades, planting of new Churches, buying of land for the newly planted Churches, engaging a local missionary or pastor and pay such persons and lots more, it is indeed a big challenge which needs urgent attention for the mission work growth to be sustained. In addition to the more improved welfare packages to the missionaries, there is need to introduction an annual subvention to the Cote d'Ivoire mission field to enable the missionaries to carry on with massive crusades, outreaches and welfare programs to the people.

2. Worldview Clash (Spiritual and Physical Realities)

Perhaps the most difficult challenge of all in global mission is the inevitable worldview clash that takes places every time missionaries try to share the gospel of Christ. The apostle Paul reminded the Christians in Ephesus that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the

heavens" (Eph.6:12 CSB). Every time the gospel of Christ is presented in anywhere Asia, or African, or Europe; there is a clash of worldviews taking place. The missionary—the one sent out from a local church—as an ambassador of Christ presents the timeless truth that inevitably collides with the myths, lies, and the predominant worldview of those in the host culture.

The worldview clash manifests itself in many ways. Sometimes, hearers' hearts and ears are closed to the truth. Other times, people will become agitated and angry about the truth shared by the missionary. But sometimes, people's hearts are softened, and the Holy Spirit is moving and working in a unique way as the gospel narrative unfolds. In all of it, one must remember there's a real spiritual battle taking place every time the gospel is proclaimed. In the end, the goal of this worldview clash is a fundamental change in thinking and living.

To acknowledge belief in the gospel in many parts of the world signifies a rejection of what has been believed and practiced in some contexts for thousands of years. The worldview clash presents a variety of significant challenges and obstacles to mission work.

3. **Marriage and Family**

This has a way of spilling over into marriages. Frustrations which cannot be expressed to others are all too frequently deflected onto spouses. This leaves marriages in great need of refueling. More so, since there are often isolated settings for mission work, there is no place to get away to be playful as a couple. There is often such a small margin of financial resources, even if there was a possibility to get away, there would be no money for it. The raising and particularly the education of missionary children have particular challenges. These challenges change as the children grow. Third culture kids (as Missionary Kids are known) have unique blessings and peculiar challenges. They are part of both the culture of parental origin and the culture where they serve.

4. **Unique Hardships**

One of the major challenges that missionaries face in the field is the hardship occasioned by lack of finance to meet up with their personal and family needs and

obligations. Again, in the some areas, almost all of the missionaries have had to deal with parasites, malaria, illnesses, infections, etc. In some mission fields, it is the harshness of the cold, while in others, it is the suffocating heat. Sometimes it is political crisis; in other places, it is demonic opposition. Some places are so wet, that everything is moldy; other places are so dry, that one's cheeks are constantly chafed and wind burned. The challenges of dangerous animals, destroying insects, earthquakes, mudslides, floods, droughts, it goes on and on! In the midst of all this, the missionary has limited resources, often only what could be carried to the mission station. Clothes are worn until they literally fade away.

5. Sacrifice

Christian missions globally, demands an ineluctable element of sacrifice for the sender and for those sent. In the book of Acts, the Church in Antioch, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, sent the first missionaries (Acts 13:1-4). One can only imagine the sense of sacrifice felt by the elders in Antioch as they fasted, prayed, and laid hands on Saul and Barnabas before sending them off on that inaugural missionary journey. Christian foreign missions are referred to be some of the most difficult work on the planet.

Moreover, the reality is the same, perhaps even more acute for those who are sent out today as missionaries. Leaving behind family, friends, vocational identity, familiar environment, and, in some cases, modern conveniences to cross geographic, cultural, and/or linguistic barriers can be extremely challenging. Thus, the sense of sacrifice for both the sender and the one sent (missionary) is noteworthy and extraordinary.

Ways to consolidate and improve the gains of the Foreign Missions in Cote d'Ivoire

Consciousness to the Great Commission and obeying the command to go for the world evangelism. Due to the fact that doing missions is part of obeying God especially as it regards to the great commission of Jesus Christ, it is therefore important that God's command is obeyed to preach the good news of the gospel to the nukes and crannies of the whole world. (Matthew 7:14--For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.). This Great

Commission is Jesus' command to His Church. (Matthew 28:18-20--And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.")

Consequently, in other to consolidate the successes of the Cote d'Ivoire missions and other foreign mission fields, some of the missionaries, sponsors, clergy and laity have made their suggestions. According to Briggs, Achi, Onuoha, Nwachukwu, Okpala, and Lucien in personal communication holds that;

> Among the ways to sustain the mission work in Cote d'Ivoire mission is to engage more missionaries who are mission minded and not those with material consciousness. There is need for attention to the language difficulties for the intending mission worker as language barrier is one of the challenges to the mission field.
> The introduction of health scheme or hospital missions approach to the already existing educational mission's approach of the Diocese of Niger Delta North. This will address the health hazards and challenges of the missionaries, their families and host communities. (Personal Communication, 2023).

Consequent upon the above findings and in other to consolidate the successes of the Cote d'Ivoire missions and other foreign mission fields, there is need to pay serious and urgent attention on the following:

i. Conscious of the Great Commission and obeying the command to go for the world evangelism.
ii. Improved Welfare of the missionaries and their families.
iii. Improved periodic and systematic progress reports of the activities of the missionary and the Church.
iv. Regular visit to the mission fields for on ground assessment of the works.
v. Provision of attractive incentives to the missionaries through jumbo salaries and allowances.

vi. More missionaries in both Priests and Laity categories should be engaged, deployed and redeployed to the mission field with special mandate and concentration on planting and establishment of new Churches
vii. Hundred percent (100%) funding or sponsorship for planting, establishment of new Churches and major crusades/revivals should be taken by the mission sponsors and not the missionary or the local Church.
viii. Introduce health scheme or hospital missions approach to the already existing educational missions approach

Conclusion

The Foreign Missions of the Anglican Diocese of Niger Delta is an option to the fulfilling of the great commission and this is reflected in the mission works and experiences of the Cote d'Ivoire Mission Field of the Diocese. The great commission of Jesus Christ and mandate to every believer in Jesus Christ is to participate in the preaching, teaching and spreading of the gospel of Christ and good news about Jesus Christ is referred to mission. The impacts and contributions of the Diocesan on foreign Christian missions are quite enormous especially in the areas of good and standard moral values, social behavioral change and education.

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