

THE CLERGY AND SCHOOL EDUCATION MANAGEMENT: CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD

by

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Abstract:

The handover of Mission owned schools by some State Governments to their original owners is a welcome development. But it has a high degree of expectation from the concerned Churches in terms of efficient and effective management task. It has some challenging areas especially as personnel and pupils of the schools handed back had developed traditions and life-styles different from those of the original founders. Added to that is the issue of dilapidated infrastructure that greeted the schools during their days on the hands of the State Governments. However, we must applaud Mr. Peter Obi, former Executive Governor of Anambra State for taking the bold step without minding whose ox is goad. He pioneered the hand back initiative in practical way. He also lived up to the promise of financing almost total renovation of the infrastructure and of providing some other necessary educational facilities so that the financial burden to the Missions would be lessened. This paper discusses the challenges facing the Christian Missions in achieving efficient and effective running of the schools which were handed back to them and their new ones. Church leaders must accept the reality of the fact that little or no amount of quality school education can be free in Nigeria at least in these early decades of 21st century and must fix a certain amount of school fees and enough staff need to be employed for efficient running of the school among others were the solution proffered.

Keywords: Clergy, Education and Management

The Clergy and School Education Management

Whether or not the whole financial burden would be borne by the State, the Missions have the responsibility of bringing back the lost glory of education by exercising genuine administrative acumen so as to sanitize the system. Uruakpa in Adiele (ed) (1996:124), affirmed that “the involvement of the missionaries in education was tied to the aims of missionary enterprise in their areas of operation.” A clear aim of the mission is to help people have the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5). The mind of Christ is the mind that produces love, diligence and

righteousness; these bring about individual actualization and social peace and cohesion. Through this process, man drops his ‘animality’ and becomes full humanity. That is the result of repentance and regeneration which the Church preaches. There is no doubt that some Church leaders are still aware that educational system is one of the surest means of evangelizing people. That was why mission schools emerged in the past. Ozigboh in Okoli (1985:78), historically asserted that “the tools the Catholic mission used to win Igbo people were varied but the most effective single tool was the school, the Igbo quest for ‘book

knowledge' (ima akwukwo)." It is this quest that makes people settle down to imbibe any information they need for transformation. Through this quest, the child is ever ready not only to get useful information but most importantly, acquire skills that will make him or her useful member of the society. This makes school system one of the best and easiest ways of passing Christian message through to the children and the youth that have not yet developed hard skin for the gospel. School is a virile and viable ground for evangelization and we must hold on to this with vigour. However, it is one thing to get back schools from the states and another thing to meet the aspiration of the people that gingered the hand over exercise. Are the present day Church leaders capable of applying effective managerial strategies that led to the Missions tremendous achievements in the world of education yesteryears? What we do with present opportunity would answer the question. The Church, not the state, has the moral instrument to make education system a worthwhile venture for better Nigeria

The obvious fact is that the clergy as it were, have been positioned by their calling to be at the forefront of using Mission schools to reshape and enliven the education sector in our land. Success or failure of the clergy in this regard determines the future of this land. Christ is the hope of human glory and the clergy are not only the mouthpiece, but also the legs and hands of Christ. There lies the onus. But it is clear that an uninformed clergyman in issues of education development, can give little or nothing in this regard. In order for the Church to deliver faithful educational service to the glory of God and for the edification of the citizenry, there are certain roles which the Clergy as the Church's agents have to play in the administration of our school system. The question is, "must every Clergyman be a graduate of education administration or management?" No, but he has to learn some basic facts about school education development. However, a clergy

man who studied education administration or related course(s) has a comparative advantage in carrying out his functions as a school manager.

The clergy who is in-charge of a parish, as a stake holder in the management of the schools under his jurisdiction, has among others the following functions:

- 1. Ambassadorial Function:-** The clergyman is an ordained ambassador of Jesus Christ, he represents Christ especially in his area of operation. Apart from being an ambassador of Christ, he is the representative of the Bishop who is by law the proprietor of all Mission-managed schools under his jurisdiction (Diocese). He represents the thoughts and person of the bishop whenever the latter is needed, but is absent. So, the clergyman is the "proprietor at hand" as far as the school under his parish is concerned.
- 2. Linking Pin Role:** He provides the needed communication link between the Church hierarchy and the schools in his parish as well as the parish council and the schools. He also links the school management with the Diocesan Education Board through which the schools of the concerned Mission link the state Ministry of Education and her relevant agencies.
- 3. Catalyst Role:** As a catalyst, he motivates and stimulates better school-community relations. He makes calls and prompt actions aimed at effective teaching-learning experiences. Church bulletins and announcements may serve as platforms in this regard apart from dedicating part of his time in addressing staff and students on some education related issues. Though it is expected that the school head shall go to the clergy (the manager) for necessary briefing on vital issues, the clergy man can also initiate meetings with the school head to

ascertain about the needs and challenges of the concerned school.

- 4. Security Control Role:** Though the principal or the headmaster remains the chief security officer of any school they head, the clergyman is assumed to be one that would provide concrete and adequate security mechanism. He has to assist the school authority employ reliable and strong security apparatus. He should always evaluate the security system of schools under him and take necessary steps to ensure that maximum protection of life and property is achieved within the school community. Part of the security issue is to secure all landed properties of the school. Necessary land documents must be obtained, photocopied and kept intact with relevant offices. It is not an overstatement to assert that some school heads are unnecessarily secretive and often careless over security issues that need prompt and careful attention. The clergyman has to form the habit of making regular contacts with his school head to discuss issues and avoid security loopholes.
- 5. Advocate's Function:** The philosophy and goal of any school can be best interpreted by the proprietor and his representative(s). The clergyman is the representative of the bishop and should always function as a foremost advocate of the principles and vision of such school. It is his duty to counter any false allegations aimed at tarnishing the school's image. Dropping necessary information during church services about the concerned schools could help in countering the antics of false propagandists. Remember that an advocate is a kind of advertiser (marketer) whose duty is not only to present the good side of the product but also to ensure its demand and sustainability.
- 6. Pastoral Function:** The clergyman is first and foremost a pastor. The leadership of every school, the staff and pupils need pastoral care from their pastor. Counseling and prayer from the clergy go a long way in creating enabling and conducive school environment. The clergy in-charge of any parish owes pastoral visit as a duty to the staff and students of any school under his jurisdiction. He visits so as to encourage, advice and spiritually build the school community up through prayers and homilies. He needs also to delegate some of the priests and other ministers under him if he is occupied with some other duties.
- 7. Spiritual Director's Function:** This is related to but slightly different from his role as a pastor. In this case, he should ensure that moral and religious lessons and activities are properly carried out. He will make sure that proper religious literatures are available and used for the spiritual uplift of the staff and students. He can raise up travelling religious teachers to assist his regular workers and teachers in moral instruction classes. Some trained evangelists are desirous of being assigned to help in that ministry. The clergy will mobilize and utilize them for this purpose. Nnachi (2008:85), gave credit to this by observing that "a great deal of caution is given to the youths in course of moral instructions." The clergyman has to direct the spiritual affairs of the school with zeal and vigour, both directly and indirectly. Spiritual tone of any school is the foundation for its moral and academic excellence. Sound moral germinates and flourishes better in a very good spiritual ground; this enhances academic performance and societal re-engineering.
- 8. Supervisor's Role:** Ogbonna and Afiamagbon in Anukam and Okunamiri (ed) (2008:272), observed that "advancement in technology and

diversified curriculum vis-a-vis the cry over fallen standards call for close Supervisory efforts to enhance performance”. This supports the idea that supervision is needed so as to avoid wastage in education. Okunamiri (2009:109), said that “educational wastage implies inefficient use of educational resources.” There is need to checkmate the causes of educational wastage through supervision. The Clergy may not be a modern professional education supervisor, but his general knowledge as a manager of human and material resources in the Church setting gives him some kind of advantage in this case. A visit to the school by the clergy with the aim of having first hand information on some aspects of the school’s life is a kind of supervision. Whatever useful advice he offers in that regard goes a long way in enhancing educational service delivery. There is need also for the clergy to often visit the school in his area of jurisdiction with the single objective of encouraging the headmaster or the principal to stimulate regular supervision exercise within the school. This is an indirect way of enhancing the achievement of the desired goal which is the main objective of supervision. The aura that goes with a respected clergyman helps to make his supervisory role to be very effective and useful.

9. Fund Mobilizer’s Role:- ‘Good soup na moni make am’ is a Nigerian parlance that indicates that every good project needs money. Nnaemeka (2009:34), opined that “education is capital intensive and needs adequate funding”. No one particular stakeholder is capable of funding the needs of education or even a school. Funds are needed from proprietors, parents and other stakeholders in order to make meaningful progress. Nwuzor, Igboabuchi and Ilorah (1998:40), reported that “financial constraints

forced Christian Missions to temporarily close down some of their schools. For example, RCM primary school in Lagos got closed down between 1873 and 1912”. To avert that kind of situation or even the state of having no financial muscle to renovate or replace dilapidating structures, there is the need for the Church to provide funds for the upkeep of her schools. The clergy is the leader that would mobilize men and women of goodwill and organizations to raise such funds. He must not leave the issue of fund raising to the school heads alone, but shall rather champion it. There is every likelihood that most people will oblige to the requests made by the clergy than those made by lay people for fund raising.

10. Bank Account Signatory:- The clergyman that represents the proprietor (Bishop) shall be the principal signatory (directly by himself or indirectly through his subordinate(s)) to all accounts of the schools under his jurisdiction. This is in order to ensure prudent use of money. Security of any amount raised for the running and development of the school is best assured when an ordained minister is in-charge of it. He shall also monitor the use of any amount being handled by the school head for certain immediate needs. Dioceses or Missions that have Diocesan Bishops and General-Overseers as the principal signatories to their schools’ accounts have to revisit their stand and revert to the system that would empower school managers in this regard. This makes for better school administration. The Bishop has other enormous responsibilities to attend to; his clergymen can and shall represent him in the business of school administration.

11. Project Manager’s Function:- The school may embark on some projects as classroom blocks, water, library block,

toilet facility project, laboratory block or even renovation works. No matter the source of the funding of any of such projects, the clergy shall act as the project manager. In collaboration with the school head and the project committee, he shall ensure that such projects are carried out religiously and in conformity with the approved specifications. It is a sign of irresponsibility for a clergyman who is a school manager not to monitor progress of work of any project in the school under him no matter who the financier(s) or benefactor(s) are. His regular presence and encouragement have a lot of message for the executors of the project; that can eliminate waste and promote efficiency.

12. Conflict Resolution Role:- It is primarily the duty of the clergy in-charge of any school to ensure that conflicts between school head and staff members are resolved amicably. He should make efforts to ensure that peace is brokered between one individual and another that have some issues. Peace is a necessary ingredient for the growth and development of any organization. The clergy shall make every effort to see that peace reigns among individuals under his spiritual directorship, by putting in place enduring conflict resolution machinery. Unresolved conflicts can retard not only the academic progress but the general tone of the school also. Ideal learning environment cannot be sustained in any school where rancor and malice reign among the staff. The clergyman as the harbinger of the gospel of peace shall diligently make efforts to ensure that school(s) under him thrives in peaceful environment.

13. Disciplinarian Role: Eneasator and Azubike (2009:155), stated that “indiscipline prevails in a situation where there is disorderliness, lack of control, anarchy and chaos. In such

situation punishment is used to sanitize the system.” This implies that where there is no provision for discipline, sanity cannot be achieved. The clergyman shall ensure that discipline is strictly maintained in the schools he oversees. He should caution erring staff members and can recommend necessary punishment(s) against unrepentant staff members to the bishop, through Diocesan Education Officers. Discipline is the core reason for Mission schools, especially, for the hand back of schools by the state Governments. Absence of discipline among staff and students in Mission managed schools means total failure of the Church in school management. We will not only pray for the will of God to be done, but will also act to enforce the will of God among those under our administrative purview. All necessary and just means of instilling discipline in our schools have to be applied against incorrigible indiscipline staff members and pupils. Jesus Christ practically taught us to do that whenever necessary (John 2:13-16). The school head and the teachers should be encouraged to apply corporal punishment on erring students whenever it is necessary. It behooves agents of the Church to apply biblical approved disciplinary measures so as to help instill discipline in our schools. No church school leadership shall abhor use of cane or any other related punishment. This is biblical and culturally African; our schools shall apply this with caution to the glory of God.

Maxwell (2002:771), quoted Abraham Lincoln as saying that “...a good example is worth more than ten thousand appealing sermons.” The clergy ought to be a shining example worthy of emulation by all. He shall try to influence the staff and students of the school(s) under him for better.

14. Facilitating Staff Employment/

Postings:- It is an open secret that schools in most states of Nigeria lack adequate number of teaching staff. Ajobiwe (2008:8), cried out by saying that “most of our schools are short staffed, particularly in core subject areas. Teacher’s work load is heavy with over 20 periods per week.” It is certain that if Ajobiwe’s research was to cover between January 2015 and August, 2016, he could have discovered that there are some teachers who have over 30 periods a week as their workload. This ugly situation does not support quality assurance. The clergy as a Mission school manager has to join in the bid to have enough teachers in schools under their jurisdiction. Where this is not feasible, they have to help the concerned schools employ those that are today called “P.T.A. teachers”. Any trained teacher who is knowledgeable in his area of specialization can deliver whether he is a state or Mission employee. The present State-Mission school management partnership cannot meet the need to revitalize education in our land if the churches fail to augment the numerical strength of qualified and skillful teachers, at least for the first ten years of the partnership. Managers of newly established Mission schools must not play with the issue of employing adequate number of trained and qualified teachers.

There are other roles which the clergymen may be required to play, but some of which are not universal in nature but are very important as they arise.

It must be noted that it is not wise for the Mission schools to pretend that there is no need for parents to bear substantial cost of the financial burden of the education of their children. States may continue to engage in their political deception of free education, but church leaders must accept the reality of the fact that little or no amount of quality school education can be free in Nigeria at least in these early decades of 21st century. Fees have to be fixed based on economic realities on ground without neglecting

financial needs of the schools. Though Mission schools ought not to be money-making enterprises but they must not be starved of funds. Parents have to pay some substantial amount to support the education of their children and wards in Mission schools.

Conclusion

The task ahead is not a mean one, but the clergy have been endowed with authority and grace to tackle them head on. All we need to do is to become transformational leaders, who would always strive to promptly translate good ideas into good actions. Let us understand that the hand back of schools to their original owners has created an interesting and healthy competition in the education industry. We have to rise up to the challenge before achieving “the man of the moment status” we deserve. All eyes are on Christian Missions as par restoring the lost glory of school education in our land. And I believe we can do it; we will make the needed difference and record optimal achievement, to the glory of God. Let us be focused, rugged and dogged, and provide our nation with the education that will produce great men and women of our dream.

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