

**‘The Role of the Laity in the Church:
Issues in current lay training in the Church of God among the Gusii of western
Kenya’**

Nelson Kumba Obwoye

MPHIL OCMS

ABSTRACT

The role of laity has rarely been completely understood, is inadequate, and sometimes is completely distorted. Significantly Christian tradition has been known to emphasize ‘profession-based’ systems through the wide proliferation of seminaries and Bible colleges aimed at producing professionals that eventually serve as ‘clergy’, in comparison to lay empowerment. On the other hand, the unity of all believers and the central role of small groups in the growth of the Christian faith communities have been explicitly expressed within the Scriptures and throughout history.

This study seeks to develop a holistic model for training laity in the Church of God in Gusiiland. It employs ‘the first-person observation principle’ within collaborative enquiry for purposes of identifying and positioning the research within a lay training and cultural context. Particular attention is paid to the central features of reflective education with a view to identifying the effectiveness of current practices and their further development. Collaborative research methodology with critical incident analysis is employed to complement aspects related to analysis and evaluation.

In addressing epistemological concerns, the study does the following: first it draws from established cultural, communal, and educational models of inclusion and relational learning. Secondly, it characterises the uniqueness of skills and their acquisition within the Gusii culture and collaborates these within faith community practice and ministry. As the collaborative research unfolds, its application and adoption as an innovative framework is concretely and cumulatively presented and tested in action through workshops.

The study provides a voice to the laity of the faith community and shows a way for them to participate in the faith community’s mission. In discovering this, it not only highlights the role of the laity in mission efforts, but also provides an extensive Gusii cultural perspective that is often missing in academic studies and ministerial formation for the mission of the faith community, both local and international. It provides an approach to strengthen the faith community’s efforts to promote evangelism with greater cultural continuity, interaction, and reflection, thus avoiding unnecessary and harmful dislocation while still fostering meta-ethnic appreciation. It is, therefore, within this shared framework that the future partnerships between the clergy and the laity may be developed. The lifelong training of the laity is of immense significance to the Church of God in the Third World and to the different faith communities in Kenya.