

# **Edinburgh 2010 East Africa Report**

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# **Theme 7: Christian Communities in Contemporary Contexts**

- Between 26<sup>th</sup>- 28<sup>th</sup> May 2009, 46 participants drawn from Eastern Africa (Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania), a variety of Christian traditions, scholars, clergy, youth, women, elderly and people with disabilities met at the Carmelite Conference Center in Karen Nairobi to deliberate on the Edinburgh 2010 Commission 7

- Themes addressed during a one year study process and at the conference reflected the pertinent issues of mission in the Eastern African context. It entailed a critical evaluation of the why, what and how Christian mission is carried out in Eastern Africa.

- 1. What is the true identity of the Church?
- 2. What is involved in being the church in Eastern Africa today?
- 3. What is the responsibility of the Church in health, healing and reconciliation?
- 4. What responsibility does Christian mission bear with regard to ethnicity?
- 5. What contribution can mission make to both secular and ecclesiastical leadership?

- 6 What new forms of Christian communities need to be harnessed?
- 7. How can mission contribute to stopping the HIV/AIDS pandemic?

## **Highlights of the Consultation:**

1. The Church is vibrant and alive in Eastern Africa as evidenced by its numerical growth, proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ, prophetic witness and mission initiatives – justice and peace- building, reconciliation health care, education, media ministry, advocacy for democracy, humanitarian assistance etc.

2. A review of mission in 20<sup>th</sup> century East Africa indicates the importance of memory. Contemporary problems in East Africa are linked to the 20<sup>th</sup> century missions. Some of the challenges faced are associated with alienation from their land, cultures, and world-views and from themselves. Christian missions played a role in this alienation. The African Christian experiences this alienation as he/she endeavors to live out the Christian calling. Mission therefore requires addressing some of the historical injustices committed in the process of evangelization; and the healing of memories.

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Although the Church has demonstrated love and concern, at another level she has been a source of marginalization of her own body thus creating centers and margins.

3. At the global level, north south differences continue to hamper church mission and at the local level, mainline churches continue to marginalize Pentecostal/ Charismatic and African Instituted churches hindering ecumenism. Within churches, stratification along class, race, ethnicity, age, disabilities etc. continue.

4. In Uganda for example, ecumenical co-operation has been threatened by sectarianism. In Kenya the Church is experiencing an identity crisis having compromised her integrity in her response to the 2007 post election crisis. Her image has been dented and her moral authority questioned. This calls for repentance, and prophetic leadership in mission. There is need for a common witness against injustice and the mission of the church should be against the power of the world and not be conformed to it.

5. The church also needs to exercise democracy in her structures if she hopes to address the lack of democracy in the secular sphere. She should maintain her identity and avoid also being entangled with civil society. She must be the conscience of the nation.

6. There is need to re-examine the inherited hierarchical, centralized and imperialistic church management models inherited from historic mission churches for they hamper inclusive participation in mission. There is need to shift to a cyclical communitarian model where God is at the center and everyone is seen a part of mission work to the glory of God. Edinburgh 2010 should challenge us to move towards a communitarian models of relationship.

7. Eastern Africa is a region largely characterized by poverty, disease, corrupt and unaccountable leadership and ignorance amidst enormous resources. The mission of the church therefore has no alternative but to direct its engagement and proclamation towards redressing this anomaly.

8. Beyond mission at home, the church in Eastern Africa has to go out to all corners of the earth to make disciples as per the great commission. In this the church has to identify the various mission fields in order to discern the engagement, proclamation and presence required of it. With globalization, mission fields are complex and so deep analysis of each situation is required.

9. Mission ought to be carried out in humility and guided by the principles of sharing, compassion, integrity (no compromise of God's mission), equity as opposed to charity, respect for the human person and cultures and building community beginning with family values.

10. Resource inadequacy continues to be a big challenge to the churches to date. Solidarity to move the Church to self reliance has not been very forthcoming and yet it is clear that management of local churches by foreign missions stifles the church. Edinburgh 2010 must be a time not so much of jubilation as of correction. Of greater importance, African Christians have to reassess the mission field afresh. We are familiar with the context in which mission is being carried out more than the foreigners and this calls us to greater commitment to mission.

11. African Instituted churches and small Pentecostal churches have innovative and authentic strategies of doing mission that utilize local knowledge and experiences. They are communities that protect and heal and this is what the Church in East Africa ought to be.

12. Women are increasingly accessing leadership in Pentecostal/Charismatic churches but this does not necessarily translate into empowerment of all women in the churches. Gender inequality and inequity as well as concern for youth and children are urgent concerns for mission in East Africa. The youth continue to feel marginalized in mainstream churches but while some have found a home in emerging churches targeting their needs and involving them in ministry, others are victims of militia groups that exploit their vulnerability. Children are an endangered community and there is need to develop and theology of childhood.