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Alemreng C. Pamela & ASE

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CASE REPORT

Assumption Sisters of Eldoret Schools

Alemreng C. Pamela, ASE*

Assumption Sisters of Eldoret

This paper examines the historical background of the Assumption Sisters of Eldoret (ASE), its Charism and apostolate and the secondary schools run by the ASE. It seeks to understand how the Sisters deal with discipline and performance in their schools. The paper also looks at the role of ASE in the management of the schools especially in financing, staff development and checking the facilities, how they handle the challenges facing the secondary schools that are run by the Sisters. The paper concludes and gives a way forward on how to improve the running of the schools run by the Assumption Sisters of Eldoret.

Keywords: Education; ASE schools; management; discipline

Introduction

The Congregation of Assumption Sisters of Eldoret (ASE) was started in the year 1957 by the late Bishop Joseph Brendan Houlihan¹ with three Sisters, Sr Anthony Kandie, Brigid Jeptoo and Clara Kitui.² The reason was to embrace the Charism³ of Participation in the redeeming mission of Christ who emptied himself and became a servant and accepted suffering in order to deliver all from sin. The need for evangelisation and rising needs of the people with whom the ASE live and work determine the different apostolate⁴, that is: teaching health, pastoral, accounts, secretarial and hospitality.

The ASE make an enormous contribution in the education sector that is in nursery, primary, secondary and colleges schools where they work as principals, deputy principals, accountants, matrons, secretaries, nurses and cateresses. This paper focuses on secondary schools. In these schools, discipline is a necessity in the teaching field because it helps students listen to teachings well and remind learners of the proper code of behaviour compared to public neighbouring schools. The Sisters are emulating good discipline as stated by George (2010), who says that discipline for the use of a wide range of techniques of behaviour, either punitive or positive, receive primary, if not exclusive attention.

The use of punitive strategies and techniques commonly seen in schools adopt a pervasive zero-tolerance approach to school discipline, for example, the use of frequent suspension and expulsion for managing behaviour problems. There is

*Email: pamelajepkoech@gmail.com

teacher-centred approach similar to manage or control student behaviour and bring about student compliance with rules and behavioural expectations. The schools run by the ASE maintain a high standard of discipline which goes hand in hand with the performance. More discipline is guided by the Congregation's⁵ core values: spirituality centred in the Eucharist and prayer life. Prayer is key in ASE schools. Students pray after waking up, before morning studies, every lesson, meals and at noon they pray the Angelus.⁶ The students recite the Rosary every day in the evening. Monthly spiritual recollections are organised for students and staff members. Discipline enables the students to respect every person, as they believe that they are created in the image and likeness of God, caring for others and respecting life. These have offered them the integrity of life, commitment to love and justice.

The secondary schools of the ASE post credible performance simply because of the discipline maintained by both students and teachers and hard work. These schools have rules applied in classrooms, Church and all round which have helped to manage student behaviour and practices which are used to encourage self-discipline. The student discipline is based on praise and encouragement. Discipline is defined by Blandford (1998) is a range of behaviour and attitudes regarded as a subsequent interpretation of discipline. This reflects the beliefs and values of all members of the school community to identify pupil needs and have shared understanding, tension which exists and possibly crises occur.

The performance is impressive because of the partnership with parents who are primary educators of their children. The parents and the schools' administration set standards together with students. As such, students are encouraged that no human is limited and believe that they can be inspired by the slogan of former United States of America (USA) President Obama. They are emulating the good performance of former secondary graduates. Njoroge (2004) says many of those who successfully complete their secondary education in Kenya are material for university education. This is evidenced by good performance when they go to study in overseas countries such as Britain, United States and Australia.

Due to excellent performance, graduates of ASE schools have been admitted to the best Universities in Kenya such as the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University and Strathmore University, to mention just a few. More so many citizens in the various capacities boast of having benefited from the quality education offered in ASE Schools. For example, Lessuda Naisula who have been of Member of Parliament of Samburu west, Sally Chebiego and Mary Keitany, the best marathon athletes. One of the principal Sisters was given opportunity to share the benefit of the students from the ASE schools and she said that once she visited the hospital when she was sick and was attended to by her former students, many of whom were nurses and doctors.

The role of the ASE in the management of schools

Assumption Sisters of Eldoret provides members of board of management whereby they represent the Sisters in the board meetings and also have a say in the transfer of the Sisters. For example, when Sisters are transferred to where there is no convent, the Superior General⁷ consults the Association of Sisters in Kenya (AOSK)⁸ to facilitate Sisters' transfers to places where they have houses in case of delocalisation. In terms of staffing, they participate in recruiting, selecting, training,

remunerating and separating in accordance to the policies, procedures and managerial skills. They ensure spiritual and pastoral care.⁹

The Sisters have devised ways where the employees enhance skills and knowledge in directions that are advantageous to their role in an institution for example. They get finance for running the schools from school fees, farming, friends of the schools, AMREF, non-governmental Organisations mostly those who take care of girl child education. Worth mentioning is the Light of Maasai girl.¹⁰ Some students pay school fees though others find it hard to do. A Sister who works in Maasai land mentioned during congregation annual general meeting that it is so hard for the Maasai people to educate a girl child. She continued saying that, there are so many people who have come up to sponsor them like the Light of Maasai girl.

The ASE write proposals to get funds to develop the schools in terms of the constructions of new classrooms, dormitories and equip the school facilities. There are some sponsors who support some students until university. For example, Nyaatha foundation¹¹ sponsors girls from needy families in ASE schools.

Challenges facing the secondary schools run by the ASE Sisters

The Sisters are grappling with so many challenges, just to mention a few. The new curriculum, strikes, drugs and substance abuse, irregularities in examination, unwanted pregnancy, boarding mixed and day schools, dress code, social media, negative cultural practices, early marriages, death of family members and lack of qualified teachers.

Harris (2011) says that, new curriculum as a new concept, its application may face some opposition amongst parents because so far most children enrolled are from wealthiest families. The same challenges are faced by the ASE schools. The new curriculum has brought a lot of challenges: it has caused a lot of debate on how it will transit to secondary from primary, changing of level within a school, move from secondary school to further education, training and employment.

ASE schools are not exceptional. There have been cases of strikes, drugs and substance abuse since the learners emulate their colleagues from other schools. Before Dr Fred Matiangi became Cabinet Secretary of Education, there were a lot of irregularities of exams, but he came and stopped this bad character of cheating in exams. However, in the Sisters' schools, it was partially practiced especially teachers who would want by all means to see their subjects excel.

The dress code remains a challenge especially to the Muslim students since they want their freedom of dressing, while Sisters' schools would want to advocate for uniformity and respect for a religion without converting them. This is not a new challenge as it has been experienced by other schools.

As explained by Mutambo (2012), the misuse of social media, for example, watching pornography videos instead of learning is also a challenge. Sometimes learners cooperate with young teachers who do not fear God to engage in pornography. The same teachers blame the Catholic schools for lack of exposure to the learners to real-life situations. This is in fact parallel to Christians values. Conrod, Joris, Brady, and Mac (2012) observed that in Kenya one of the counsellors from the schools commented that, peer pressure is a disease by itself, it influences students' behaviour towards drug abuse and behaviour that negates school rules.

It is also a great challenge to teach learners who feel that they are already adults after undergoing the initiation rites and no one should teach them what to do. A

Sister Principal in Rombo (Maasai) was interviewed and she said, 'It is very difficult to work with Maasai girls who have undergone Female Genital Mutilation(FGM) since they feel that they are adults and no one should control them'. MacBeath and Younger (2013) observed that in Kajiado, a semi-arid area supporting mainly pastoralist community, where environment pressure combines with cultural practices of FGM and early marriages, there is a reduction in the number of girls in schools.

The issue of early marriages where girls are booked when they are still in the mother's womb is quite a challenge. Education in such a culture is not a priority but there is an effort to come out of it although in some communities it is still a major dispute. There is also a face of ceremonies celebrated after the death of a family member that forces them to shave part of the hair and leaving some. Such a practice sometimes becomes a great issue in schools because it is against school rules where most learners are encouraged to uniform shaving style. Lerner (1999) earlier on argued that, there are cases where the lives of girls had been stigmatised by male schoolmates. One of the ASE Sisters observed that in the mixed boarding and day schools some boys stigmatise girls and some learners come with drugs to those who are in the boarding section. She also said that whether its drug abuse, it is all about the societal moral decay or devil worshipping, and the root cause of all these is poverty. Early pregnancy in girls, where there are many dropouts in form two, such that most girls leave their studies for maternity leave.

Financial constraint has caused the loss of competent and qualified teachers since they are paid low. Given that the only source of income is school fees and most learners come from low income background, sometimes teachers are not paid at all. Hunt and Carper (2012) reported that what is faced by ASE schools is similar to other Catholic schools. There has been competition between Catholic schools with the nearby public and private schools for the best teachers and salaries can be highly attractive. Financial management has rightfully become a primary challenge, one that impacts every other dimension of school life.

The ASE are grappling with the mentioned challenges by having guidance and counselling in the schools. Aluede, Carey, Harris, and Lee (2017) affirms that there is a wide gap between the need that learners have for counselling and the ability of the schools in providing the appropriate opportunity for counselling. This is due to lack of skilled professionals and making the head of the department in charge of counselling. Sometimes the learners freely share their challenges and are helped before they make extreme decisions such as leaving their studies or committing suicide. Since these schools are not exceptional but with the pastoral care they are given, there is no mentioning of strikes but there are attempts that have been contained so far.

In addition, the schools have also initiated a programme of having parents in school once in a term to create awareness of the challenges the learners are going through and it is done in the form of workshops and orientation.¹² They normally call experienced and professional speakers to share with the parents how to take care of the school-going children without giving too much freedom to their daughters and sons.

To the learners, in addition to counselling, they are given talks on different topics by different speakers to keep the learners updated on topical issues. During holy Mass¹³ and pastoral care, they are reminded on gospel values like love, charity, caring and fear of God since he created the human person in their image and its likeness.

Motivation of qualified teachers is paramount to the ASE schools. Teachers are paid well so that they display good results as posted by most ASE schools give an impressive performance.

The motivated teachers encourage learners to be active in class and develop a positive attitude towards subjects because of the friendly environment between teachers and students. The schools also have parent's day, academic days and clinics that are organised as a provision for individual parents to meet and voice their concerns about their learner's future. Forman (2016) opines that parental involvement in the discipline of a child in the present Kenya is one of the reasons for having at least one day in the year when parents come to the school to participate in the day's activities with their children, teachers and the leaders of community around.

It has been noted that ASE use motivational speakers to encourage learners in life. This concurs to the proposition of Abrutyn (1997) that classroom activities are not enough but it is good to have different methods of teaching. Teaching life skills is very important because learners are trained on how to handle life issues, for example, on how to go about in life and have abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that would enable them to deal effectively with demands and challenges of life.

Conclusion

The study highlighted historical background of the ASE, its Charism and apostolate in secondary schools. Discipline and performance in the schools, management and the challenges and how they are grappling within Kenya and come up with policy recommendations to education. The Sisters play various roles in the administration of the ASE schools. That is why they always maintain high-level discipline for the excellent academic performance of most of the schools. Although the ASE schools face a number of challenges such as new curriculum, financial constraints, drug and substance abuse, unwanted pregnancy, boarding and mixed day schools, dress code, social media, negative cultural practices and early marriages among others, the schools meet their main objective. Through the schools, the Sisters are fulfilling their charism.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes

1. Is the Bishop who founded the Congregation of the Assumption Sisters of Eldoret.
2. The first Sisters who were admitted and professed as the first pioneers in the Congregation of the ASE 1963.
3. Charism is the way of life of religious life and is a gift from God for the church and the world, given as different ways of living out the Gospel.
4. The mission the Sisters or activity they engage in.
5. Congregation is the word used to mean an assembly of persons met for the worship of God, for religious instructions and a body who habitually so meet.
6. The angelus prayer is a famous Catholic devotion said three times each day at dawn, noon and dusk.
7. The General leader of the Religious Sisters.

8. AOSK – is an association with more than 160 Congregations spread across the 25 Dioceses of Kenya as women guided by the Gospel values and the social teaching of the Catholic Church.
9. Is a postmodern term for an ancient model of emotional, social and spiritual support that can be found in all cultures and traditions as well as support for people from religious communities.
10. Light of Maasai is an organization that sponsors Maasai girls
11. Is the foundation where Sisters help sponsor girls secondary and college school fees.
12. Way of introducing people on how life is lived.
13. Is the central worship of the Roman Catholic Church which culminates in celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Notes on Contributor

Sister Alemreng C. Pamela is member of the Congregation of Assumption Sisters of Eldoret, currently working in a school among the Maasai community in Rombo, Kenya.

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