



## The Theological Significance of Social Action in the Context of Holistic Evangelism in Ugheli Diocese of the Anglican Church

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**Abstract.** This paper discusses the theological significance of social action against the backdrop of holistic evangelism in Ugheli (Anglican Communion). Generally, evangelism is the ultimate task of the Christian church as evident in the biblical account of the mission of the twelve (Matt. 10: 5-15; Mk. 6: 7-13; Luke 9: 1-6) and the seventy (10: 1-20). Holistic evangelism entails converting non-Christians to Christianity and retaining, as well as strengthening, the faith of the converts. Yet, one of the greatest impediments to effective holistic evangelism in contemporary times is the lack of enchantment on the part of the target audience. This paper therefore, examines how social action impacts on evangelism, using the Diocese of Ugheli (Anglican Communion) as a case study. Historical, analytical, and evaluative approaches were used in the study. More so, the study employed the phenomenological approach to data gathering. The study finds that social action, as a practical demonstration of commitment to the well-being of the people, is an impetuous tool for evangelism as the church addresses the socio-economic problems of the people alongside their spiritual needs through social action. The result of this is increase, not only in the number of converts, but also in the number of those effectively retained. The study concludes that evangelism without social action in contemporary times is counterproductive. The recommendation is that churches should pay adequate attention to social action as a tool for effective holistic evangelism, particularly in Ugheli (Anglican Communion).

**Keywords:** Social action, holistic evangelism, effective tool, Ugheli Diocese, Anglican Church.

### 1. Introduction

The need to advance the gospel of Christ in the present scheme of things cannot be overstressed; indeed, expanding the kingdom of God is the major business

of the church. Incontrovertibly, evangelism is the tool for achieving this task. Evangelism is the principal obligation given to Christians by Christ as stated in the gospels. This task may appear to have been undertaken effectively by the church, given the phenomenal proliferation of churches and the seeming increase in attendance at church services; but the fact remains that there is a difference between nominal Christians and devout ones. Therefore, it is observable that evangelism in contemporary times suffers inefficiency as the people to whom the gospel is taken are either not interested or the already converted ones are losing interest in the faith due to the issue of waning relevance and integrity of the church. There are at least two ostensible reasons for this disenchantment: (1) socio-economic factors militating against the well-being of the people such as hunger and lack of necessities, and (2) the growing consciousness that the church is imperial and capitalist with exploitative tendencies, amassing wealth without sufficient corporate social responsibilities (if at all) targeted at helping the poor and the needy.

In other words, most of the self-acclaimed Christians are not integrated into the body of Christ. More so is the fact that many non-believers are out there who do not consider the church as something socio-economically profitable to them. It is for this reason that Barreca (2020) spoke of integrated mission as a paradigm of evangelism that blends the gospel with socio-economic responsibility. The survey carried out by this study coupled with participant observation unequivocally shows that the surge in the number of attendants in various churches, particularly the so-called prophetic ministries, is induced not only by the need for solutions to perceived spiritual afflictions but also by their anxious desire for spiritual intervention in their socio-economic predicaments, whereas majority of the population in the church are not permanent members committed to the “kingdom”; hence, they can easily switch from one church to

another in search of fulfillment. This negates the expected result of evangelism and therefore, underscores the need for a new methodology.

As Enegho and Enwafah (2004) rightly stated, it is a fact that given the prevailing cultural, economic, social, and political circumstances in Africa generally, the Church has the onus of fashioning a unique self-understanding and develop approaches that will enable it to respond to the challenges orchestrated by the socio-cultural, economic and political contexts of the people. Orobotor (2000) equally shared the view that the credibility and relevance of the Church derive from its effectiveness in addressing the people's prevailing socio-economic, cultural, and political situations. Thus, African Churches are faced with the options to preach the Gospel that will respond to the existential challenges of a people that are marginalized or witness a situation where the Christians will sink with their unrealized hopes, and neglecting this reality will certainly amount to the church risking the loss of relevance and credibility.

One other dimension to this reality is the fact that nearly all the modern trending “prophetic churches” may not be affected in terms of loss of membership, whether the members are genuinely committed or not, because of the perception of worshippers that such churches provide solutions to their problems; whereas, the mainline orthodox churches such as the Anglican church struggle with the phenomenon and therefore require practical means involving social action to deal with the challenge. Against this background, this study focuses on the significance of social action for holistic evangelism in the Diocese of Ugheli Anglican Communion. This is where the concept of social action becomes imperative.

## **2. The Concept of Holistic Evangelism**

Holistic evangelism as used in this paper refers to the kind of evangelical engagement that is targeted not only at winning converts into the church but also at ensuring that the converts permanently remain in the church and become fully integrated into the “kingdom” by practically making the gospel relevant to them, using the resources of the church and the gospel itself to address their socio-cultural and politico-economic problems. Thus, it is the view of this paper that evangelism has two dimensions that make it holistic: seeking converts and ensuring that the converts stay within the fold and effectively commit themselves to the church. This is in tandem with the view of some scholars, as reported by Ogunewu (2014), that evangelization is not only a process that seeks to convert non-Christians to the Christian fold

but also a continuous process through which the converts grow continually into spiritual maturity to become well-grounded in the Christian faith.

According to Amoah (2014), from a holistic perspective, evangelism involves the systematic integration of diverse plans and approaches to propagate the gospel in such a way that it meets the different needs of the various target audiences and effectively converts them to Christianity. According to this view, therefore, holistic evangelism is only realistic if it involves systematic integration of the gospel as given, the appropriate methods, the peculiarities of the setting, and the objective of connecting the target audiences to God’s saving grace; hence, the cardinal feature of this paradigm is that it recognizes and applies the understanding of the diversities of the society. Amoah (2014) further stated that in a society that is increasingly diversifying, holistic evangelism is imperative to make the propagation of the gospel and the message more appealing to prospective recipients. Holistic evangelism is sensitive to the divergent needs of the people for whom the gospel is meant; it takes cognizance of the fact that the target audience is not only specific but also generic and this understanding makes it possible for the church to treat people peculiarly and differently by their distinctive characteristics.

## **3. Conceptualizing Social Action**

Social action is used in several ways, and it has various synonyms such as social work. However, social action as used in this study is that form of social engagement that is masses-oriented, with the welfare of the masses at the core of its objectives. It refers to a wide range of initiatives taken to bring about positive change in a given system or structure and to cause effects that would promote a particular goal. Social action is based on the premises that goals are people-driven; thus, by acting in the interest of the people, they are motivated or convinced on the need to be committed to the course associated with the social actors or social workers. In the view of Kaushik (n.d.), social action is a method or an aspect of social work through which the rights, interests, and dignity of marginalized persons are protected by opposing or counteracting the actions of those systems, institutions, and structures that accumulate resources and power which they distribute to a few persons or sections of the people that are not sensitive to the plights and needs of the weaker ones in the society; and through social action, skewed power and resources are reallocated to ensure the upliftment of those groups that are disadvantaged in the society.

More so, social action aims at building a just, democratic, transparent, and harmonious social system. In more specific terms, Kaushik (n.d.) explains that social action aims at addressing important economic, social, ecological, political, health, and ethical issues in a given society or social system; and a wide range of voluntary actions and activities such as relief work, advocacy campaigns, charity, welfare service delivery, social movements, public policy initiatives, networking for social transformation and socio-political mobilization. Therefore, social action covers the whole gamut of activities meant to achieve desired social changes that would be profitable to the masses. The most basic and evident component is material poverty, defined as a fundamental lack of resources due to low income, zero-hour contracts and insecure employment, costly housing, debt, and the rising cost of living.

#### 4. Theoretical Framework

While many interrelated theories explain the positive correlation between church growth and social action, this study focuses on Religious Market Theory. As well as Religious Economy Theory. The Religious Market Theory, put forth by Iannaccone (1990), explains that churches expand when they provide distinctive social services that are hard to find in the secular world. This is also related to the Social Capital Theory established by Putnam (2000), which maintains that churches expand as a result of their social deeds that create social capital. The networks of relationships that exist between members of a specific society and facilitate its smooth operation are referred to as social capital. These postulations also agree with the Religious Economy Theory propagated by Stark and Finke (2000), which maintains that churches grow when they compete for followers by offering attractive social services. Stark and Finke found that churches that compete for followers by offering attractive social services tend to grow faster than those that do not. The Social Integration Theory, also put out by Stark and Finke (2000), similarly holds that social action frequency can have a major influence on church growth rate, is another theory that lends credence to this one. The claim is that since they foster a sense of belonging and community, churches with greater social activity tend to draw larger memberships. Empirical evidence for this notion comes from several studies, including one by Scheitle (2008) that discovered a link between social activities and Church development.

#### 5. Theological Foundation of Social Action

As Omoosor (2018) aptly stated, there is a need for a functional theological education such that people can imbibe the culture of mutual existence and dependence to bring about or enhance socio-political stability. Such theological education cannot be without the idea of social action, which is a humanitarian or humanistic engagement. Theologically, social action can be conceived in terms of the love of God and the need for humans to extend such love to fellow humans. Social action finds a basis in the Bible. Christians' views have been heard and their presence in the social sphere has increased in recent years. The Bible's emphasis on aiding the impoverished and standing up for those unable to speak for themselves, as evident in Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:35, and James 2:14–16, has drawn attention from Christians and non-Christians.

A few decades ago, it was believed that religion was best performed on Sundays, behind closed doors, but the understanding of modern Christians shows that Jesus' intention was never meant to be so. Jesus Christ, taught that love be shown to one's neighbours as much as one loves him/herself. Yourselves. It is for this reason that many Christian groups and organizations have led the way in charitable acts in some climes. Christians are among the most socially engaged communities in the world (Matthew 22:39). However, it is a reality that is sometimes forgotten in society that Christians who wanted to change the world founded the majority of significant humanitarian endeavors, including hospitals, orphanages, and colleges. Adherents of Christ led the abolitionist efforts in England and the United States. Thus, social action has long been a practice that is based on biblical principles.

Scriptures copiously affirm the centrality of the biblical call to meet the full range of people's needs, not just spiritual needs. As Permann (2012) puts it, when people are hungry, they need to be fed (Matthew 25:35); when they are mistreated, there is a need to stand up for them (Isaiah 1:17; Job 29:12-17); when they are sick, they have to be visited (Matthew 25:36). It is for this reason that Christ rejected the false believers in Matthew 7:21-23 despite apparently being great preachers, for they neglected the obligation to meet people's real, concrete needs as Christ instructed in Matthew 25:35-46. In the same vein, in Matthew 9:13, Jesus chided the Pharisees for not understanding the Scripture that "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" (steadfast love in Hosea 6: 6). The Pharisees consistently put their strange and odd rules over the welfare of people, and this Scripture stands squarely against that. This Scripture teaches us that what God requires of us is not following made-up rules, or even rules that seem justified based on "self-protection" or

keeping ourselves from sin, but serving people and meeting their needs (cf. also the related instance in Matthew 12:1-8).

One of the best passages on the significance of social engagement and providing for one's physical needs is God's declaration that he desires kindness (steadfast love) rather than sacrifice. This is particularly evident in the connection to the Good Samaritan Parable, where the acts of the Samaritan in seeing to the man's physical needs are referred to as "mercy" (Luke 10:37) and "compassion" (Luke 10:33). Jesus frequently met the bodily necessities of the multitudes out of compassion for them (Matthew 14:14; 9:35-36). Being aware of one's physical needs and responding to them is a fundamental part of being merciful.

What Jesus is teaching in essence is that true compassion is not only providing for the necessities of others but also going above and above for the undeserving. It goes beyond saying, "Do good to those who do good to you," to say, "I desire mercy." According to Jesus, genuine compassion is fundamental love for sinful, undeserving people. The Pharisees failed to understand that God does not limit our ability to show compassion to those who appear to be "worthy." Love that does not embrace the unworthy is not true love at all. That is the reason the call to love one's adversaries is core, not peripheral, to the biblical love ethic (Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-36; Romans 12:19-21). True love always has compassion for sinners, the unworthy ones, including one's enemies. (Permann, 2012).

#### **6. The Correlation between Social Action and Evangelism**

Both in the past and present day, there have been various forms of social actions that have played an important part in the growth of churches. Historically, social actions were primarily motivated by the Church's mission of spreading the gospel and serving the community. The Church was frequently the focal point of social life, offering not just spiritual teaching but also social services including charity, education, and healthcare. The effect of this phenomenal role of the Church in society is that it promoted a sense of community and belonging as it attracted more individuals to the Church (Stark, 1997). During the Middle Ages, the Church was the principal supplier of social services. Monasteries functioned as schools, hospitals, and orphanages; and the Church was frequently the only organization assisting the destitute and needy. This social action did not only fulfil the Church's goal of service, but it also attracted additional adherents, thereby helping the Church to grow (Duffy,

1992). In the United States, for example, the Evangelical Church in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century has been partly attributed to the active participation of the church in social issues. The stance of the Church against religious freedom, abortion, and same-sex marriage has drawn a sizable number of followers who share similar beliefs (Smith, 2000).

Philanthropy is one of the most significant social behaviors that have positively affected Church expansion. From a historical point of view, churches have been in the vanguard of providing relief and support to the poor, which has drawn new members and led to their expansion (Smith, 2005). Churches continue to engage in humanitarian initiatives today, such as maintaining food banks and shelters for the homeless, which do not only benefit the community but attract new members as well (Johnson, 2018). Social involvement has also had a huge impact on Church expansion. Churches have frequently been active in social justice campaigns, including the eradication of slavery and the civil rights struggle in the United States. This involvement has not only aided in societal transformation, but has also drawn people who share similar understandings, beliefs, and values, resulting in Church development (Williams, 2007). Churches are still involved in social activism today, such as lobbying for the rights of immigrants and refugees, which is attracting new members (Gonzalez, 2019).

Community participation is another sort of social action that has had a substantial impact on church growth. Historically, churches have been serving as community hubs, allowing people to assemble and participate in a variety of activities ranging from education to entertainment. This has served to attract more people to the Church, resulting in its development. Churches continue to serve as community hubs in modern times, offering a variety of programs and activities that address the community's needs and interests, attracting new members (Brown, 2016). Education is another social movement that has contributed significantly to Church growth. Historically, churches have been playing an important role in education, from maintaining schools to supporting adult literacy programs (Green 2002). This has not only served to increase literacy rates, but it has also drawn more people to the Church, adding to its expansion. Churches are involved in education today, offering a variety of educational activities and resources that continue to draw new members (Miller, 2020).

Peace and reconciliation advocacy is another sort of social engagement that has had a substantial impact on Church growth. Churches have historically been involved in peace-building activities, ranging from conflict resolution to reconciliation (Lederach, 1997). This has not only served to bring about peace, but it has also drawn people who share similar values and views, resulting in Church development. Churches are still participating in peace-building initiatives today, such as calling for peace and reconciliation in conflict-affected areas, which attracts new members (Schirch, 2015).

From a more African philosophical perspective, the propagation of the gospel ought to reflect the core African values. Generally, the principles of communitarianism are well entrenched in Africa, where people are expected to be their brothers' keepers. Omosor and Omosomuofa (2020) have emphasized the fact that the concept of neighbourhood ought to be generally demonstrated in and by all religions, particularly Christianity; because religion (Christianity) without humanity is not only counterproductive but also a disaster. Thus, the presentation of the gospel to the target audience must be done in such a way that reflects the African concept of care and social responsibility. Unfortunately, this humanistic aspect of Africanness is dangerously being eroded by the evading culture of individualism and self-centeredness (Omosor, 2020). The social actions of the church put the church on the track of humanity.

The frequency of social actions correlates directly with the rate of Church growth. Stark and Finke (2000) have asserted that the more regularly a Church participates in social activities, the faster it grows. They say that social actions allow churches to interact with society, gaining new members. This connection frequently brings about an increase in the number of people that attend Church, resulting in Church expansion. Although, the frequency of social engagements is not the only factor influencing Church growth. Hadaway (2002) found that the quality of social interventions is also important. Churches that offer high-quality social services grow at a higher rate than those that do not. This results from high-quality social actions bringing more individuals to the Church, resulting in expansion. Apart from the fact that social action grows the church, there is the development aspect of it. The church is expected to be part and parcel of the socio-political and economic development of the society. Rather than use the gospel negatively to amass wealth and meddle selfishly in politics, clerics and therefore the church ought to promote good governance and development, not only by acting as watchdogs and engineering social justice

like Prophet Amos (Omosor, 2019) but also by leading by example in matters of social welfare and charity.

## **7. Factors Militating Against Social Action in Ugheli Diocese**

There are some impediments to effective social welfare. Some of these impediments are briefly explained below:

### **7.1 Poor Budgeting**

Though the Diocese has tried so much to show concern for the welfare of members, records show that the response is more from a fire brigade approach. Members are made to respond as emergency to the needs at hand. Consequently, there are marked stresses on the face of the Diocesan members who may not have responded appropriately largely because they may not have had to pay immediately.

### **7.2 Availability of Personnel**

The church only depends on volunteers to carry out this important assignment. However, the welfare concern requires consistency, dedication, and selflessness. Those vested with the task are not paid hence they cannot go beyond their limits of volunteers without remuneration.

### **7.3 Effective Management of Resources**

The available resources to the church in this direction are so limited yet there are growing challenges of appropriation of the lean resources to meet all needs as they arise daily. This situation has made it rather difficult for the personnel to experience financial stress, straining themselves to ensure that there is provision for all.

### **7.4 Lack of Continuity**

Oftentimes than not, the Diocese has faced the problem of continuity in the pursuance of the program which may not have anything to do with it but the persons concerned with the implementation of the agenda. Like the Government scheme, a similar fate happens to it too. Once the interest is not there are the tendencies to overlook certain areas as of less concern. The Account in Acts of the Apostles is a good example here.

## 8. Social Action and Holistic Evangelism in Ugheli Diocese

The Anglican Diocese of Ughelli is one of the 11 Dioceses within the Anglican Province of Bendel, which is one of the 14 provinces within the Church of Nigeria. The current bishop is Cyril Odutemu, who became Archbishop of the Province in 2020. Right from the creation of the Diocese, there has been an emphasis on evangelism. The church saw the need to initiate actions and undertake projects that impacted positively on the church. An example of the initiatives taken was the establishment of a counseling unit of which each Parish was to have a counseling unit to meet the counseling needs of the people. The head of this unit is the Vicar for that Parish. Also, the establishment of a security group, named "Holy Light Guild". This group comprised more of the youths who were trained as security men. The establishment of a fish pond by the Diocese was also significant. At maturity, the fish were sold to both the members and the public at a subsidized rate. Again, the Diocese is into mechanized farming to provide food for the people. Furthermore, the Diocese has embarked on a project to establish a hospital. Apart from these initiatives taken by the church, there are other forms of social actions taken by the Diocese that have implications for evangelism. These are enumerated below:

### 8.1 Establishment of Schools

According to Onokpite, Okorode, Imonikugbere, and Omonigho (Personal Communication, 2024), as it was during the missionary era, the establishment of schools in one of the principal policies of the Anglican Diocese of Ughelli. Buttressing the point further, they noted that the schools are not for the benefit of members of the diocese alone, but also for the use of the general public. According to him, this policy of the diocese has contributed immensely not just for the purpose of enhancing the development of the educational sector of the country, but is helping to produce well-informed, academically sound and morally upright wards and youths, future leaders of the country. According to (Opete, Ighoshemusua, Akpodamure, and Idoro Personal Communication, 2024), the diocese currently runs two secondary schools, Bishop Agori- Iwe Memorial Boys Grammar School, Ughelli and Anglican Girls Grammar School, Ughelli which was returned to the diocese a few years ago by the Delta State Government during the tenure of Governor Emmanuel Ewetan Uduaghan. Both schools are situated in a serene environment, fully equipped with modern boarding facilities and state-of-the-art

laboratory and internet facilities (Atevure, Personal Communication).

Buttressing his point further, Atevure noted that currently, most Archdeaconries and parishes in the Diocese owned nursery schools and basic and secondary schools. The incomes realized from these educational institutions have helped to reduce the financial burden of the diocese and parishes. Omakoko did not only concur with Atevure's postulations but observed that through the educational policy of the diocese, tuition-free education is yearly given to orphans and other brilliant students facing extreme financial crisis. According to Edemo (Personal Communication, 2024), this humanitarian gesture is reserved not only for the members but outsiders as well, as a way of giving back to society.

While appreciating the efforts of the diocesan, the Most Rev. Cyril. O. Odutemu and the Board of Governors of the various diocesan schools, he noted that the budget of the diocese for running of the schools is still grossly inadequate. He postulated that as God Himself, the Lord of the mission provides for the diocese, more and more pupils and students, especially the less privileged and the unreached children can be supported.

### 8.2 Establishment of Diocesan Health Centre

Like the missionaries, the Diocese of Ughelli gives premium to healthcare development. In this regard, the diocese is currently building ultra-modern medical facilities with the state of the art of equipment. The researcher is currently the chairman of the medical board (Abizor, Personal Communication, 2024). At the diocesan, Archdeaconry, parish, group, and individual levels, the diocese from creation has continued to pay medical bills of parishioners who are medically challenged, this includes the clergymen and their families (Otuisi, Ediba, Okolu, Edafiakemu, Ugbobor and Dadi Personal Communication, 2024). This humanitarian gesture has helped in no small way to provide hope, healing and a sense of worth to members, which in turn has helped to double their commitment. According to Dafese (Personal Communication, 2024), this legacy gives room to those affected to know that they are remembered when many would have forgotten them.

### 8.3 Provision of Relief Materials to Victims of Natural Disaster

Most of the respondents including Onabedje, Akpodiete, Ujevwecha, and Atevure others maintained that one of the areas where the Anglican

diocese of Ughelli distinguishes herself in social welfare services is in prompt response to victims of national disaster both at the National and state, Local Government and Church levels. Commenting on this, (Oneyibo, Esharedede, Otuisi, Idoro, and Ediba, Personal Communication, 2024) noted that it is enough to mention the flood that occurred in most of the country in 2012 which rendered many communities, especially in the rural areas homeless. Ughelli Diocese in particular was seriously affected especially in the riverine communities. The communities mostly affected were Okwagbe, Ofrukama, Okwama, Orere, Ewhu-Urhobo, Okparabe, Ihwre-Okpe, Arhavwarien, Agadama, Ohorho, Uwheru and others. The diocese spent over two million naira in cash and distributed many other materials such as food items, mattresses, cloths, blankets, treated mosquito nets, water, and other relief materials (Ighoshemusua, Personal Communication, 2024).

In a similar vein, Onokpite, Esharedede, Otuisi, Idoro, and Ediba (Personal Communication, 2024) highlighted the positive role played by the Anglican Diocese of Ughelli, in 2020 during the outbreak of Covid 19 pandemic. Commenting on this, Esharedede noted that apart from over four (4) million naira sent to the Church of Nigeria it also sent palliatives to widows, orphans, and other less privileged members of the diocese. Omonigho, Abizor, Opete, Abiri and Dadi also recall several relief materials sent to Internally Displaced Persons (IDP'S) especially in the Northern parts of Nigeria.

#### **8.4 Donations to Missionary Dioceses**

According to Williams, Omodoro, Otuisi, and Ovwore (Personal Communication, 2024) donations to Missionaries Dioceses is one way the Anglican Diocese of Ughelli has demonstrated her social concern and action since creation. According to Dadi, Umukoro and Oneyibo (Personal Communication, 2024), some of the dioceses that have benefited from these gestures include the Diocese of Tamale in the Republic of Ghana, Missionary Diocese of Damaturu, Diocese of Maiduguri, Diocese of Western Izon and others.

#### **8.5 Resolution of Inter-Tribal Conflicts**

Another way the Anglican Diocese of Ughelli has demonstrated her social responsibility especially within her geographic location is in the resolution of inter-tribal conflicts. It is enough to mention the conflict that arose between the people of Gbaregolo and neighbouring Ijaw communities (Edemo, Abiri, and

Otuisi, Personal Communication, 2024). According to Edemo the then Bishop of Warri Diocese, Late Rt. Rev. N. A. Enuke, The Rtd. Bishop of Ughelli, Rt. Rev. V. O. Muoghereh alongside Chief E. K. Clark, late Evang. Jeremiah Consin Mosheshe and others helped to resolve the crises which lasted for many years. Special End of Year Gifts to Widows

According to Idolor, Esharedede, Ograh. Apole, Kika and Fole, this is one way the Diocese of Ughelli demonstrated her love towards her members. According to Esharedede, this is a yearly programme of the diocese. During such occasions, the diocese distributes empowerment materials such as sewing machine, grinding machine, cloths, cash, and food materials. The Diocese has successfully carried out this social welfare service since the creation (Okolu, Akpoyibo, Kekeruke and Eborol, Personal Communication, 2024). The practice is to encourage members and the public alike in saving souls who otherwise would have been lost through pains and other challenges. The ultimate aim is to win such souls from the grave. There are testimonies in this area from those who have benefitted from the scheme. Empowerment scheme – the Church's social welfare in the area of empowerment scheme has remained a source of succor to many. Also, the Aged Population is not exempted from this. The Diocese provides free medical Care for the older ones in the society. The Archbishop Cyril O. Odutemu has emphasized the need for Counseling to cater for the emotional, spiritual and other needs of the society. Each year, he meets with the Parishioners to discuss issues and to hear their challenges. He then gives them his fatherly counsel, and encourages them to extend to their congregation.

The Diocese also undertakes and selects some special persons for training in skilled areas such as agriculture, technology and entrepreneurship. Such individuals are further equipped to train others within the Diocese. This venture is in line with the Delta Statement Government entrepreneurial development which has continued to promote and empower youths and rural women. The Ministry of Youth Development Rural Skill Acquisition (2022) is premised on alleviating poverty. The Diocese here provides a complementary function for the State, the involvement of the Church, and the present government led by Sen. Dr. Arthur Okowa. The overall goal of the Diocese is to win some from the 'street' and settle them while becoming useful vessels in God's vineyard.

The Diocese sees Condolence, marriages, and birthdays as aspects of social welfare as a necessary event. Death usually comes uninvited and the Church

cannot shy away from its reality. Okorode (Personal Communication, 2024) noted that the role of the Church in providing support and assistance to family members cannot be quantified yet, it has no direct financial benefit hence, it remained a corporate social responsibility. The laying to rest of the dead by the church is considered as a funeral in the daily consideration. The Church charges no fee for these services rather, the family only shows appreciation with gifts (Omejevwe, Personal Communication, 2024). Ediba, Etadaye, Amagada, and Umukoro (Personal Communication, 2024) noted that the celebration of birthdays and marriages among others in society cannot be treated with levity. The way and level of involvement of the churches within the Diocese is like a double-edged metal prong that can be used to reach out to lost souls within such functions. Omonigho and Onovwiemore (Personal Communication, 2024) corroborated the above respondent, adding that the church sometimes defrays the cost of some items needful and provides basic needs like Jesus at the marriage in Cana of Galilee.

## **8.6 Women's Social Welfare Services**

From the women's angle, Mrs. Ufuoma Odutemu, wife of Archbishop Bendel Province and Bishop of Ughelli has been able to empower many through gainful employment in the water factory, hostel at Ofuoma, event centre at Ughelli among others. Each year they pick two boys or girls that they train on a skill, thereafter empower them to start life. This year 2022, a boy was picked from Agbarha Archdeaconry who was trained in plumbing work and empowered to start life. Currently, a boy from Uwhrode Archdeaconry is undergoing training in Alumaco construction and building. At the expiration of his training, the women will empower him by funding him to start his outlet, to be fair to himself and his family (Ogborhu, Personal Communication, 2024). Some of the numerous social welfare services of the women are as discussed below.

### **8.6.1 Distribution of Welfare Packages During Festive Periods**

During Easter outreaches, the Women Organization visits hospitals and orphanage homes, in order to make these persons enjoy the blessedness of fellowship. They distribute gifts, foods-perishable and non-perishable, soaps, clothes, etc. They have started building an orphanage home to house the homeless and less privileged (Dadi, Personal Communication, 2024). Such an action, no doubt, would impact positively on the lives of the people and also promote holistic evangelism.

### **8.6.1 Scholarship/ Empowerment Programmes**

Every year the women's group organizes programs and examinations where the best two students are selected for a scholarship in both secondary and tertiary education. A girl has graduated from a nursing school through this scheme, just to name a few. The Diocese gives out scholarships to the youths (who wish to go to school) and trains both men and women in various trades. On completion of their training, they are usually supported financially to stand on their own (Willie, Personal Communication, 2024).

### **8.6.1 Evangelism Outreaches by the Women**

The women's wing also embarks on rugged rural evangelism. They preach the gospel to the people. In the course of these activities, they share and distribute welfare packages like clothes, foodstuffs, writing materials, etc. They do this each time they celebrate their week, alongside the Mothers Union. Recently, the Women's Organization, opened a Water Factory to employ the teeming youth population, to enable them to engage as distributors and workers (Omonigho, Personal Communication, 2024).

## **8.7 The Impact of Social on Evangelism in Ughelli Diocese**

There is no doubt that social actions taken by the church impact on evangelism. Its major impact is on the retention of new converts as well as existing members, which is the hallmark of holistic evangelism. There are testimonies by members of various churches within the Diocese who otherwise would not have been converts today if not for the role played by the Church. Ugbobor (Personal Communication, 2024) stated that his membership in the church was as a result of the wonderful role played by the Church. From his narration, one can deduce that the involvement of the Church, her message, and fellowship which is both warm and cordial has contributed immensely to the expansion of each family's welfare and eventual expansion. Ilega, (2005), discussing how different religion grows, noted that every birth of new babies contributes significantly to her membership. If welfare packages are something to sow on, then, the level of involvement by the Church sends the salient message to all in attendance on such occasions. Once beaten, twice shy goes the saying but the red-carpet message cannot be disputed.

Another aspect of the impact of social action on the church is that it enhances the corporate image of the church. The corporate image of the Church is all about her message which we cannot separate from her

gospel. Onokpite (Personal Communication, 2024) noted that the corporate image of the Diocese should be seen as her message/gospel to society. Okolu (Personal Communication, 2024) posited that if the message is at variance with her social corporate image, then the Church would have lost the goal/focus of her mission. The amount of money spent does not count; rather the way people receive her message is what matters. According to Edemo (Personal Communication, 2024), the message preached with practical love is more forceful and real to unbelievers than mere words. The extent to which every aspect of the message is demonstrated before the dying world counts/determines her impact.

## 9. Conclusion

From a theological point of view, it has been established that holistic evangelism characterized by social action is the key to effective soul-winning. This is because the theology of social action stresses the fact that the gospel is not only meant to propagate spirituality and project eschatological values; but it is also meant to practically respond to the existential needs of the people, which will attract the target to the church and the “kingdom project”. It is one thing to get people into the church and another thing to sustain their conviction about the essence of the gospel and the relevance of the church. More so, with the trends in contemporary society in which materialism and non-religious means of wealth acquisition are the order of the day, convincing people to embrace Christianity could be an effort in futility. It may be convenient or even persuasive to argue however, that prophetic ministries do not need to engage in any arts of charity to win converts since prophecies and miracles hold adherents bound to the church; but there is a difference between miracle seekers or nominal Christian and genuine Christianity. Thus, there is a need for churches such as the Anglican Church to address themselves to the realities of the people’s experiences, particularly in terms of socio-economic well-being.

This study has shown that social action has been a significant factor in the evangelical engagements of the churches in the Anglican Diocese of Ugheli. Such social-oriented activities such as care for the widows, healthcare provision, provision of relief materials for internally displaced persons, granting of educational scholarships, human rights advocacy among others have helped to enhance evangelism in the Diocese. However, the ability of the churches in the Diocese to adequately carry out social actions is diminished by a lack of both human and material resources, particularly finances and skilled personnel, hence

there is a need for the church to allocate more resources to social actions to enhance holistic evangelism.

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