
**CONTRIBUTION OF INTERDENOMINATIONAL MARRIAGES TO
CHRISTIAN UNITY IN THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF KENYA:
FOCUS ON NAKURU ARCHDEACONRY, KENYA**

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: This study sought to explore the contribution of interdenominational marriages toward Christian unity. It focused on the relationship between interdenominational marriages and Christian unity at the Anglican Church of Kenya, Nakuru Diocese, focusing on the Nakuru Archdeaconry. In particular, the study sought to establish if there is any relationship between interdenominational marriages and Christian unity and whether these marriages can be used to enhance Christian unity.

Statement of the Problem: Interdenominational marriages are increasing today regardless of the challenges surrounding these marriages. Ironically, despite the historic challenge of Christian unity, Christians from different denominations can settle together in marriage overlooking their denominational differences. What can we learn from these marriages? Can these interdenominational marriages be an avenue for enhancing Christian Unity today?

Method/Methodology: The study employed the concurrent embedded strategy of the mixed-method research approach to answer the three research questions. The research targeted 177 interdenominational couples from the Nakuru archdeaconry and 85 clergies from the Nakuru diocese. Majorly quantitative data were collected from 111 interdenominational couples using questionnaires, while qualitative data was collected using interview guides administered among 15 clergies of the Anglican Church of Kenya Nakuru Diocese. The quantitative data was coded and entered into Statistical Package for Social sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means were used in the analysis, and the results were presented in tables and charts. Qualitative data was analysed and presented thematically using summaries.

Results of the Study: Results showed that interdenominational marriages positively impact Church unity as they promote interaction between Christians of different denominations and foster acceptance and understanding of differences in doctrines and beliefs.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendation: Based on the finding, the study recommends that the leadership at the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) and other churches offer support by accepting them and offering pre-marital and post-marriage counselling to interdenominational marriages as an instrument of promoting Christian unity.

Keywords: *Interdenominational marriages, Christian Unity, Anglican Church of Kenya, ecumenism, interchurch marriages*

INTRODUCTION

An emerging trend that is considered a viable strategy for promoting Christian unity is interdenominational marriages. Interdenominational marriages are marital unions between individuals from different Christian denominations (Reardon, 2018). A religious landscape study by the Pew Research Centre (2015) found that 39% of Americans who were married (nearly one in every four) had a spouse of a different religious group. These figures mark a notable increase in interfaith marriages, given that only 19% of married couples were in interfaith unions in 1960. 18% of the interfaith marriages documented by the Pew Research Centre (2015) were between Christians and the religious unaffiliated, while 15% were between Christians of different Christian traditions (interdenominational or interchurch marriages). The proportion of interdenominational marriages in the United States of America (USA) stood at 13% in the 2000 to 2009 decade, 12% in the 1990 to 1999 decade, and 10% in the 1960 to 1969 decade.

In the United Kingdom (U.K.), the proportion of interfaith marriages was estimated to be 20% in 2010 (McAloney, 2012). Smith (2019) opines that because the U.K. is increasingly becoming a multicultural society, the number of interfaith marriages is bound to increase. This trend implies mainstream churches such as the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church. Using Demographic and Health Surveys data from 15 countries, Boucaud (2020) established that 9.7% of marriages in Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA) are interfaith marriages. Several factors have contributed to the rise of interfaith marriages, including higher education levels, urbanisation, and relaxed social norms. However, the study by Boucaud (2020) focused on intermarriages between people of different faiths, such as Christians and Muslims, and not intermarriages between people of different Christian denominations. All Christian denominations were treated as one faith.

However, some churches are not enthusiastic about interdenominational marriages, which are viewed as products of rebellion against families, and some pastors discourage marriage partners (Mugambi et al., 1982). Regardless of the forces which discourage interdenominational marriages, they are still on the increase. For instance, in the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK), banns of marriage records, Cathedral of the Good Shephard, Cathedral archdeaconry, Nakuru Diocese in 2019, three out of twelve marriages (25%) were interdenominational. In 2018 seven out of twenty-four (29.2%) marriages were interdenominational. It was also interesting to observe that although, in some instances, the

couple to be married were all members of the ACK, their parents were not, sixteen out of twenty-four parents (66.7%). It could imply that at some point, the interdenominational couples were not members of the ACK as they attended their parents' churches. This is just an example of 2019 and 2018. However, there is no year in the banns of the marriage record of the Cathedral of the Good Shephard Nakuru Diocese that does not record an interdenominational marriage.

Another example is Crater parish, Kiamunyi archdeaconry, a smaller church with few weddings but still recorded interdenominational marriages. For instance, the one marriage in 2020 was interdenominational from the banns and marriage records. There was no wedding in 2019. In 2018 three out of the four marriages (75%) were interdenominational. In both Parishes, the Cathedral of the Good Shephard and Crater parish, intermarriages involved different churches. Interdenominational marriages are vital as they bring members from different churches into the Anglican Church.

According to Port le Rei (2009), interdenominational marriages are agents of church reunion to become legitimate rebuilders of Christian unity. Shastri (2014) further asserts that a mixed marriage inspired by the Christian spirit can do much more to further the unity of Christians. This study sought to determine whether interdenominational marriages in the ACK Nakuru Diocese promote unity among Christians and what we can learn from them.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Interdenominational marriages are on the increase (Hugoye (2020); (Doyle, 2019); Weaver (2011)). In the ACK Nakuru Diocese, Nakuru archdeaconry Menengai parish banns of marriage records show that the two marriages in 2020 were interdenominational; In 2019, six out of the seven (85.7%) marriages were interdenominational One out of the two (50%) marriages that took place in 2018 was interdenominational, the two marriages (100%) that took place in 2017 and all the three marriages (100%) that took place in 2016 were all interdenominational. Interdenominational marriages seem to be an issue of concern in the Nakuru Diocese; this is just an example from one parish in Nakuru archdeaconry without counting those whose marriages are not recorded in the banns of marriage records. This is an accurate picture of increasing interdenominational marriages and is not only in the ACK but in most churches.

While many efforts to unite Christians have been put in place, it remains a challenge (Adingo, 2020; Gez & Droz, 2017). Nevertheless, Christians must not be destabilised by their divisions but should instead work towards overcoming them since that is Jesus' will (Naseri, 2015). This study seeks to investigate the relationship between interdenominational marriages and Christian unity. It is ironic that despite the denominational disunity among churches, interdenominational couples can settle together in marriage overlooking their denominational differences. Is there something we can learn from these couples that can help the church to enhance Christian Unity?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To investigate the contribution of interdenominational marriages in enhancing Christian unity.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the contribution of interdenominational marriages in enhancing Christian unity?

THEORETICAL REVIEW/ FRAMEWORK

This study employed faith development theory. This theory described stages of faith development and was published in 1981 by James W. Fowler. This theory helps us know what we may expect as people grow up in their faith (Keeley, 2010). The stages are hierarchical such that one cannot go to the next stage before achieving the previous one. Fowler (1981) describes six stages of developing a person's faith. They include intuitive-projective faith, mythic-literal faith, synthetic-convictional faith, intuitive-reflective faith, conjunctive faith, and universality faith (Coyle, 2011).

The study had a specific interest in the fifth stage, the Conjunction faith stage; someone can own the community's faith differently. This is because the individual faith that someone has developed becomes 'our faith.' "One learns to affirm the difference of the 'other' while remaining grounded in one's tradition" (Gathman & Nesson, 1997, p. 410). The person is ready for significant encounters with people, for instance, from different Christian traditions than theirs. The person who desires to try out other traditions to see if they could enhance their religious experience. One is not afraid to recognise the wisdom that others can offer about faith. Someone at this stage is open to other people's viewpoints of the Christian faith. They are open to insights that can give them a more enriching knowledge of God (Andrade, 2014). They can take up teaching and service opportunities to work in other churches while remaining committed to their home church. They can also become part of a different church tradition without feeling like they are abandoning their church tradition.

This theory relates to this work about the influence of interdenominational marriages on Christian unity. The faith of an individual develops and goes through stages. The people at the different faith developmental stages will have different impacts on enhancing Christian unity depending on the conceptualisation of their faith. Particularly interdenominational married couples who have experienced different traditions can present unbiased or biased attitudes to their children during the first four stages of their lives. Suppose they accept each other's traditions and are happily and actively involved. In that case, their children are likely to learn the importance of respecting other traditions and hence a generation that learns to accept and appreciate other Christian denominations.

Fowler's theory, however, has limitations. Faith is a gift from God, and it would be like denying the role of the Holy Spirit, who grows people's faith by categorising the development of faith in stages (Keeley, 2010). Additionally, regardless of the stages and ages given, the stages' timings differ from one person to another. Coyle (2011) particularly questioned the applicability of this theory to explain women's faith, asserting that women's faith does not develop linearly and systematically but rather in a whirlpool manner. Andrade (2014) further observed that this theory was simply the beliefs of Fowler regarding what faith development should look like. Andrade (2014) opposed the idea that a person at the last stage of the theory should be deemed to have superior faith to a person at the lower stages.

Despite the limitations, this is the most appropriate theory to explain how Christians and especially those in interdenominational marriages, could play a positive role in promoting Christian unity. The conjunctive faith stage is very relevant for interdenominational couples

since it is a stage of willingly showing interest in other traditions without abandoning theirs. Moreover, perceptions about faith and Christian unity are developed from a very early stage of a person's life as the children observe their parents, caretakers, and Sunday, school teachers. Attitudes about other traditions are transmitted by those who bring up children. In this case, interdenominational parents can transmit positive values about different Christian traditions to their children by illustrating acceptance of their spouse's Christian tradition.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Wabukala (2013) remarks that Christian unity requires an honest acknowledgement of our differences and a willingness to work and understand why we exist. This genuine unity can only flourish where there is both humility and willingness to speak the truth to each other in love. Naseri (2015) observes that Christians can overlook their differences and work together. The ecumenical relationship does not require Christians from different denominations to agree at every point to be authentic; it only calls for respect among different Christians who share a commitment to obey the word of God. This means that though Christians from different denominations may have varying doctrines and ways of worship, they have a unifying fact that we all believe in the Word of God and are called by the name of Christ. The Bible does not identify Christians with any specific church; no church has been mentioned as the 'real' church in the Bible. This means that there is only one Church and Christ is its head.

John 17:21 says that " all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (New International Version [NIV]). The prayer of Jesus for his disciples is a prayer dear to the heart of many interchurch spouses who are united by their baptism and marriage but nurtured in their life by two distinct churches which are not in communion with one another. In this journey, the partners are dependent upon the Holy Spirit, who brings love, trust, and understanding into the world that they may be one. Bowman (2013) observes that Christ's church is not a denomination; it consists of all saved. The author further asserts that there are no Christians outside Christ's church. This means that Christians should avoid the temptation of looking at fellow Christians from a different church from theirs as not being Christian enough.

This calls for different denominations to appreciate their differences and not see them as threats or victimise each other for doing things differently. For example, if a certain denomination practices praying loudly during their service, they should not see the one who prays using prayer books as not filled by the Holy Spirit. Those who pray using prayer books should not perceive those who do not use prayer books as disorderly. Both should learn from each other, and, in the spirit of ecumenism, they could occasionally pray in a way out of their norm. This is just one example of the way Christians worship differently.

The New Testament teaching regards the church as having a corporate identity as God's people are called to corporate mission responsibility to the world (Kosse, 2013). As the body of Christ, we need to embrace and respect our differences since through the differences, people of different interests are evangelised. For instance, one person would be attracted to worship through hymns like the Anglican Church. In contrast, another may be attracted to dancing alongside praise and worship songs familiar in Pentecostal churches. However, the root aim remains that they all come to know Christ. The differences in the Church of Christ are equivalent to people using different means of transport to arrive at the same destination. As Hauerwas (2013) notes, where Christians are divided, the gospel cannot be true since the

underlying objective is to worship God. Therefore, Christians criticising each other's way of worship is like a kingdom that is divided against itself.

The ACK All Saint's Cathedral Strategic Plan (2017-2021) objective is to strengthen the church's partnership with other churches and para-church organisations in evangelism and outreach (ACK All Saints Cathedral Diocese, 2016). This would be applauded since when Christians evangelise, they ought to speak as one church of Christ, not different denominations; hence such partnership is the right path towards attaining Christian unity so that the non-believers can see that the church of Christ is one. Hauerwas (2013) says that the challenge of Christian unity depends on how Christians discover that they need each other. That implies openness to learn from each other at one point in time.

Another area of interest stipulated in ACK All Saint's Cathedral Strategic Plan (2017-2021) is to benchmark for best practices with other churches and also be in collaboration with other churches as the voice of the Kenyan Church on national issues, leadership, spiritual matters, partnership, and financial support. They also plan to share experiences with other churches, have mutual respect, and adhere to sound doctrine. This is a step that can be applauded; it shows a willingness to collaborate with other churches and acknowledgement the role of the church in Kenya.

The strategic plan also illustrated Christians moving from one church to another as a challenge facing the ACK All Saints Cathedral. What would make members hop from one church to the other? Budde (2005), on the other side, sees the freedom to change denomination as a success of the ecumenical movement of the late 20th century and early 21st century. Budde continues to affirm that this freedom to change churches affirms the true koinonia of the church by embracing other denominations as faithful representatives of another part of the body of Christ hence recognising the marks of the church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

This could mean many things, for instance, that those moving to other churches have attained ecumenical freedom. It could also mean that they are looking for something to quench their spiritual thirst. Hence, the ACK All Saints Cathedral's effort to collaborate with other churches can be applauded. This could help curb the challenge of Christians moving from one church to another, hoping to integrate what they learn from other churches into their worship services and other church activities. Their strategic plan also plans to organise family-related workshops, conferences, hang-outs, and retreats for married couples. This is very important since, during such forums, they would discuss issues facing married couples, like challenges facing couples in interdenominational marriages. The ACK All Saints Cathedral strategic plan has been referred to since many ACK churches benchmark with them. For instance, the Nakuru Diocese Cathedral of the Good Shephard indicated a willingness to benchmark with other Cathedrals in their strategic plan. This would be a good opportunity for them to learn about the ecumenical strategies of the All Saints Cathedral Nairobi and trickle it down to the ACK Nakuru Diocese and other churches whom they interact with, for example, at the NCCCK (National Council of Churches in Kenya).

Hauerwas (2013) observes that conflict is part and parcel of the Christian life. This implies that the church's unity is not based on agreements, but that which assumes disagreements should be a testimony of the existence of reconciling people. Hauerwas adds that Christians are obligated to love one another since love determines what Christian love is. Hauerwas

further opines that the different ways of worshipping Jesus are neither right nor wrong but just different. These differences must be tested so that those moving from one denomination to another can be confident that they worship the same God. For instance, a member of one tradition must be able to explain why other traditions see things differently and not just criticise blindly, like why ACK uses prayer books or liturgy during their services or baptise children, among other doctrinal differences.

Shroff (2014) sees the church in Africa as having much significance in the people's spiritual, social, political, and economic lives. Shroff (2014) argues that when churches in Africa work together, they may achieve great results. For instance, the South African Council of churches mobilised churches to challenge apartheid in the 1980s leading to political transformation. Shroff (2014) observed that church councils provide an appropriate forum for interchurch collaboration. Recently in Kenya, during the COVID 19 crisis in 2020, the interfaith council, comprising of leaders from different faiths and denominations, worked together to discuss matters of different issues, for instance, the reopening of churches and other places of worship. These leaders also collaborate during national prayers. Ecumenical organisations such as church councils operate mainly at the national and international levels. Other ecumenical cooperation occurs at diocesan and deaconry levels, whereas it is rare for church leaders at parish and village levels to engage in formalised ecumenical cooperation (Shroff 2014).

The number of interdenominational marriages is quite substantial. In most countries, at least one of two marriages of Catholics is with a Christian of a different denomination (Ryan, 2014). The growing interdenominational marriages are evident in the Roman Catholic Church and other churches. Putnam and Campbell (2012) noted that in the 21st century, over 50% of all marriages cut across religious faith, with 40% of couples remaining in different faith even after getting married; the attitude of young people and their parents has also changed and become more accepting of interfaith marriages. Factors like the pursuit of higher education in institutions of higher learning mostly away from one's home increase the chances of young people meeting potential partners who are different from them either ethnically or religiously.

There is a need for the church to face the reality of interdenominational marriages, which are on the increase since they are seen as a sign of living ecumenism (Murphy, 2015). The church should move towards accepting interdenominational marriages and be ready to accept members from different churches and release their members to other churches. Were (2003) notes that interdenominational marriages conducted within the church should illustrate that there are no divisions in Christ. This is because of how interdenominational couples accept and become part of their spouses' church. Hence the church should accept Christians who confess Christ from different denominations without questioning.

Couples in interdenominational marriages do not like their marriages to be seen as the problem since the real problem is the differences in the different denominations (Pillay, 2017). Ironically the problem is not the interdenominational marriages but the historical divisions and differences in the various churches. It is worth noting that the divisions that exist in the different denominations have developed historically. This could explain why different Christians hold firmly to what they believe. Those differences can be overcome through genuine and authentic love for one another, primarily through interdenominational

marriage with time. Interdenominational marriages can bridge different churches since these marriages bring different churches together.

Interdenominational marriages could also promote good relations between churches and extended families if steps are taken by those involved (Ciocan, 2016). By the time an interdenominational marriage in Africa is consummated, it brings many people from different churches together. These interdenominational marriages could be seen as an opportunity to bring ecumenism to the grassroots. For instance, if two Christians from different churches are getting married, they present many opportunities for Christians of different denominations to meet during the marriage preparation ceremonies like introduction, dowry negotiations, dowry payment, and the actual wedding ceremony. Besides, they open up room for other similar meetings as their family and friends from different Christian denominations will often visit them, thus a platform for socialisation and appreciation of the other. These opportunities, if well utilised, would make the Christians involved come to appreciate that Christians are one body of Christ. Therefore, as different people interact, the uncomfortable feeling about people from different denominations may slowly disappear as they meet in the wedding activities that bring people together (Shaffer, 2008). For instance, if they experience different pastors preaching, different ways of praying, and singing with time, they could appreciate the different practices of Christians from different traditions.

Hayes (2018) argues that interdenominational marriages are marriages of informed consciences and great faith that could become a valuable ecumenical resource when the church accepts to hear their voices and reflect on their experiences. Hendricks (2012) notes that interchurch families exemplify receptive ecumenism, whereby Christians can learn from each other in a way that does not threaten but enriches their faith. In interchurch marriages, one reaches to embrace what is best in the other tradition. Hendricks hence sees interchurch families as an excellent example of how Christians can learn from other denominations in a way that does not intimidate any party. Knieps (2015) adds that interdenominational marriages are called to echo the reconciling love of God in Christ and the pattern of Christ's love for his church. In the covenant of marriage, interdenominational couples form one church at home, but in this case, their domestic church relates to two separate ecclesial communions. Therefore, these marriages are an embodiment of Christian unity.

Receptive ecumenism is approaching other churches with a spirit of openness, ready to learn from the positive insights without necessarily accepting what one might regard as limiting or restrictive aspects. Additionally, Bowman (2013) says that a marriage between two Christians of different confessions has a vital role in making Christ's prayer, all be one into reality, and argues that ecumenical marriage is crucial in the movement toward Christian unity. Reardon (2004) applauds interdenominational marriages by considering them as marriages that live the hope and difficulties of the path to Christian unity. Port le Rei (2008) says that the difficulties in interdenominational marriages arise from the fact that the separation of Christians has not been overcome. He sadly observes that this will not disappear unless the complete visible unity of all Christians has been re-established.

Ecumenism does not mean that one should not see any problem with other people's religious beliefs and practices. It entails not judging other churches and what they believe in, learning from others, and integrating positive aspects of their faith with their faith (Davies & Thate, 2017). It entails adopting the philosophy that no denomination is good or bad. We can learn so much from each other regarding spirituality, worship styles, music, and many other

aspects. Interchurch families can have a significant and unique contribution to promoting Christian unity because they are a living manifestation that it is possible to develop love and understanding of one another despite religious and spiritual differences (Pizzey, 2015). Interdenominational marriages can help in a small way to bring churches together as one body of Christ. They can provide a platform through which a Christian from one denomination learns new things about another denomination that question previous assumptions.

Knieps (2015) opines that interdenominational spouses can foster Christian unity by sharing the practical experience of the hierarchy of truth that they discover by sharing many Christian resources that they have in common. They can also share their understanding of the specific riches of their respective traditions through exchanges in their daily lives. Knieps (2015) adds that interdenominational spouses can draw their own families of origin into the ecumenical orbit by pulling them into a broader relationship. The families of both spouses may come to rejoice together in the broader perspective, such as children's initiation into Christianity.

There is a false assumption that by learning from other churches, a church is sacrificing something of its own identity (Hendricks, 2012). As a result, many churches are reluctant to draw lessons from other churches unless their counterparts are willing to take up some of their practices (Hendricks, 2012). However, the truth is that a church that is willing to learn from other churches benefits more by enriching members' experience of being Christians. Therefore, Receptive ecumenism is about letting go of those doctrines that divide Christians from each other (Pizzey, 2015). Hendricks (2012) challenges the belief that the way to unite Christians is to look at what is the same in all churches since this leads ecumenism to be seen in negative terms as a matter of losing various things specific to us. Nevertheless, receptive ecumenism is about learning something from another tradition.

Ironically, Hendricks (2012) observes that churches are divided because they have lost something due to the separation over the centuries; for instance, the Catholics see great importance in universal teaching authority and have at times lost the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the individual believer. On the other hand, some Pentecostal pastors overemphasise the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching and ignore the importance of profound teachings to Christians. Christians hence get the best of their spirituality if they are willing and open to learning from each other.

King (2007) says that ecumenical marriages should be understood as a potential resource for Christian reunions. Marriage unites people physically, interpersonally, socially, and theologically through love. King continues to ask if the unifying dimensions of marriage can reconcile differing denominations through ecumenical marriages. He says interdenominational marriages can contribute to Christian unity since they are called to exercise a prophetic role for our large church communities. Hence, to approach interdenominational marriages as problematic, we miss the actual problem: the division among Christians. Interdenominational marriages allow the Christian denomination to address their disunity and establish a universal church.

The big question is whether the unifying dimensions of marriage can reconcile the different denominations through interdenominational marriages. As interdenominational spouses continue to familiarise themselves, they overcome biases against each other. The couple overcomes a history of prejudice through love that is mostly inherited. With time, the spouses

not only come to understand each other's traditions but also integrate some of their partner's traditions into their own. The insights that interdenominational couples gain from their marital experiences will then be handed to their families, friends, and congregations.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

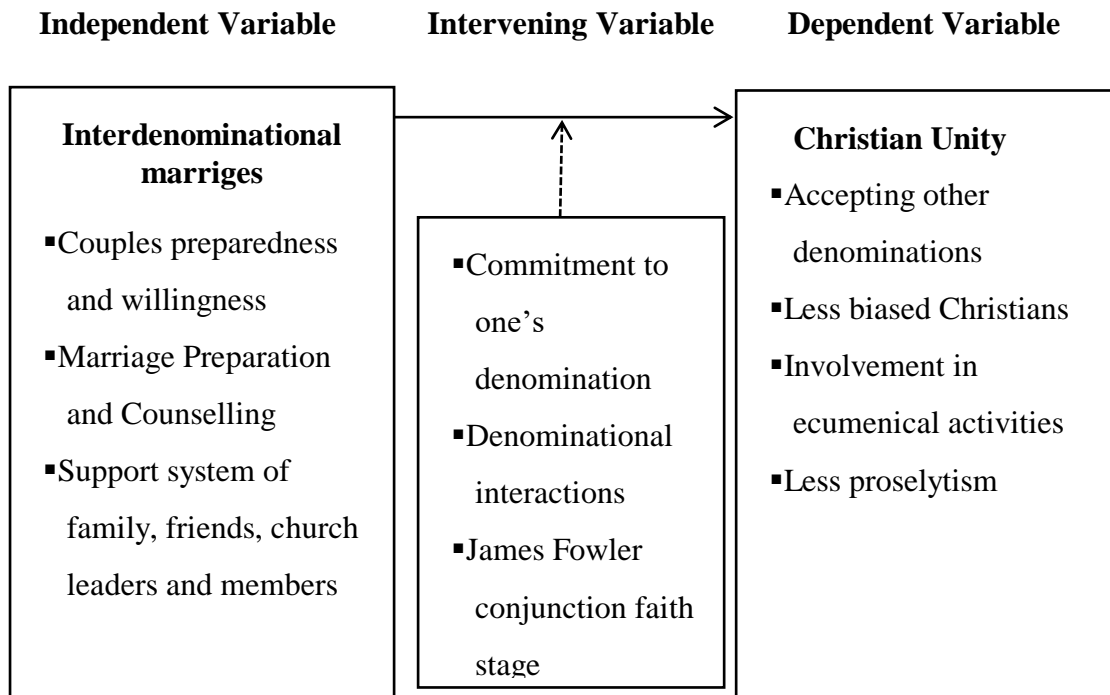


Figure 1: Relationship between Interdenominational Marriages and Christian Unity

Figure 1 shows the relationships between the independent, intervening, and dependent variables. An interdenominational marriage that is hypothesised to enhance Christian unity is one where the couple is: prepared, willing, and accepts to get married to someone from a different denomination from theirs; pre-marital and post-marital counselling prepares the couple to adjust to their interdenominational marriage; a strong support circle of family, friends, church leaders, and members helps the couple to feel accepted in the new denomination.

Other intervening factors that are likely to affect interdenominational couples' contribution to Christian unity are the couple's commitment to their initial denomination; it is hypothesized that a couple who is committed to their primary denomination may find it difficult to accept another denomination, especially if they have not attained James Fowler's conjunction faith stage and lastly whether the interdenominational couple has interacted with people from different denominations and attended interdenominational activities for instance, from institutions of higher learning, are likely to be less prejudiced than those who interact more with people from their denominations only.

Christian unity is manifested when Christians focus on similarities than differences in different denominations; Christians become less biased on the doctrines of other churches, accept each other regardless of their denominations and engage in ecumenical activities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employed a mixed-method research approach. Mixed method research uses qualitative and quantitative data to answer research questions and collect and analyse qualitative and quantitative data in a single study (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2012). The research specifically used the concurrent embedded strategy. The concurrent embedded strategy is a strategy of mixed methods that use different methods to study different groups, qualitative data was collected using interview guides, and quantitative data was collected using questionnaires (Creswell, 2009). Data from the interdenominational married couples were collected using the drop-off and pick-up method. The method entails distributing the questionnaires to the interdenominational couples and collecting them at a later date. The clergy in the various parishes helped to distribute the questionnaires. This distribution method was most appropriate as it minimised personal contact, which was an issue of concern due to the Covid-19 pandemic since this research was done when churches in Kenya were locked down due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

This study used the survey method to collect information from interdenominational couples on their attitudes and opinions concerning Christian unity. It sought to describe interdenominational marriages' contribution to Christian unity by asking couples in these marriages about their experiences and perceptions. Survey design is also financially economical, facilitates rapid data collection and the ability to understand the population from a part of it. Moreover, the survey was the most suitable method for collecting extensive research [Nakuru diocese] (Oso & Onen, 2009). The study assumed the form of a cross-sectional survey where information was obtained at one point in time.

The study site was the ACK Nakuru archdeaconry. According to the Church diary and lectionary, the Anglican Church of Kenya has 38 dioceses spread throughout the 47 counties in Kenya. The Nakuru diocese consists of seven archdeaconries: Cathedral archdeaconry, Kiamunyi archdeaconry, Nakuru archdeaconry, Njoro archdeaconry, Subukia archdeaconry, Kabatini archdeaconry, and Naivasha archdeaconry. The Nakuru Archdeaconry serves the population in Nakuru East Sub-County, part of Nakuru North Sub-County, and Gilgil Sub-County. These three sub-counties (see appendix 3) had a combined human population of 597,185 people during the 2019 National Housing and Population Census (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). The areas comprise both rural and urban settings.

The population for this study comprised all interdenominational couples at the ACK Nakuru Diocese. The research also targeted clergy in this Diocese since they are critical players in interdenominational marriages and Christian unity. ACK Diocese of Nakuru strategic plan records that Nakuru Diocese has 85 clergies. According to the clergy of Nakuru archdeaconry, there are approximately 177 interdenominational couples. It was not easy to determine the exact number since most people came to the churches when they were already married. Some of those who got married in these churches have moved to different churches.

The Nakuru archdeaconry was purposively selected because it consists of parishes distributed in most areas of Nakuru County; hence, it was likely to offer parishes and participants representative of all the ACK Diocese of Nakuru and members in the country. According to the ACK Diocese of Nakuru Development plan (2013-2017), parishes like Menengai parish, Section 58 consists of literate and exposed Christians. Senior business people are likely to be on the know-how of the topic of study. These parishes are located in the heart of Nakuru

town. While other parishes are in the rural parts of the county, farmers and others possess only basic education, for instance, Kiambogo parish, Kiptangwani, Kiambogo parish. Hence, this population was likely to give balanced feedback on the topic under investigation.

This study sampled 62.7% of the population of the study. The stratified proportionate random sampling technique was employed to select the sample. This technique entailed dividing the population into internally homogenous groups known as strata and then selecting participants from each stratum using random methods (Creswell, 2009). The number of participants selected from each stratum was proportional to the total population of eligible participants in the stratum. The clergy from the Nakuru archdeaconry were purposively selected since they are already a representative of all the clergy from the Nakuru Diocese. They are representative because it is a tradition for clergy from Nakuru to be transferred from one parish to another. Hence, the clergy were likely to share experiences from the current parish and other parishes they had served previously.

The completed questionnaires were sorted out by examining their completeness. Those found to have completed appropriately were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for Social sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means were used in the analysis, and the results were presented in tables, charts, and graphs. Qualitative data was analysed and presented thematically using summaries that correspond to each research question, and the theme was supported using illustrative quotes (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative data collected from the interviews with the clergy was analysed continuously during the interview, the researcher filled in the semi-structured interview guide. Later, the researcher expanded the notes and organised them into themes based on the three research questions (Forseth & Everett, 2013). The themes were discussed alongside the quantitative findings and supported by illustrative excerpts from the interview transcripts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic Profile of Participants

The participants' demographic information collected includes their gender, age, schooling level, occupation, and the number of years in the current marriage. According to Allen (2017), reporting the demographic information of study participants helps determine how well the sample used in the study was representative of the target population. It also facilitates the transferability of findings by helping research consumers to determine whether the findings would be applicable in their contexts. This information is summarised in Table 1 as follows.

As Table 1 illustrates, the largest segment of the sample (58.6%) was made up of female participants, with males making up the remaining 41.4%. This distribution is most probably due to differences in the accessibility of female spouses as compared to male spouses. It is consistent with the study by Pew Research Centre (2016), which observed that women were more religious than men, especially among Christians. In particular, the centre found that 40% of females attended church services at least once a week instead of 32% of males. Current findings are also consistent with Omer (2018), who found that 58.7% of the participants drawn from the ACK Kisumu Archdeaconry were female

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Participants

Demographic Trait	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	46	41.4
	Female	65	58.6
Age Bracket	21- 30 years	8	7.2
	31- 40 years	41	36.9
	41-50 years	52	46.8
	51-60 years	8	7.2
	61 years and above	2	1.8
	Highest Education Level	Primary	9
	Secondary	19	17.1
	Certificate	20	18.0
	Diploma	32	28.8
	Bachelors	20	18.0
	Masters	11	9.9
Employment status	Unemployed	6	5.4
	Employed	47	42.3
	Self-employed	55	49.5
	Retired	3	2.7
	0-5 years	16	14.4
	6-10 years	25	22.5
	11-15 years	29	26.1
	16-20 years	14	12.6
	21-25 years	13	11.7
	26-30 years	7	6.3
Number of Years in Marriage	31-35 years	3	2.7
	36-40 years	4	3.6
	Traditional	22	19.8
	Civil	10	9.0
Type of Marriage	Church	79	71.2
Whether the participant was a member of ACK before marriage	Yes	42	37.8
	No	69	62.2

Results also indicate that the largest segment of the sample (46.8%) were in the 41-50 years bracket, followed by those in the 31-40 years brackets at 36.9%, with other age groups having representation of less than 10%. The majority of the participants (83.7%) fall in the James Fowler conjunctive faith stage. This distribution has primarily been shaped by the age at which most couples marry and the average age of churchgoers at the ACK. Table 1 further shows that the sample was quite diverse regarding the participants' highest level of education. The largest segment (28.8%) had the diploma level of education, followed by bachelors and certificate levels that accounted for 18% each. 56.7% of the participants had an educational

level of diploma, bachelors, and masters degree; this is consistent with Boucaud (2020), who observed that the higher the education level, the more likely individuals to promote Christian Unity. This is because, in the institutions of higher learning, one interacts with people from different denominations and cultures. Those who are Christians will find themselves attending interdenominational fellowships and are likely to get into love relationships that lead to marriage during those interactions. These findings are congruent with the study by Omer (2018), who also found that the population of registered members of the ACK Kisumu Archdeaconry was diverse in terms of education levels, with 25.36% having the primary level, 43.48% having the secondary level, and 31.16% having tertiary education.

Table 1 also illustrates that the sample was diverse regarding the number of years that the respondents were married at the study time. This implies that the study captures participants' views at different stages of their marriage, and thus findings are likely to represent different segments of the married population in the church. Lastly, Table 1 shows that most participants (71.2) were married through a church wedding. This is likely to imply the level of preparedness of the couples for marriage and the experiences because most people who are married through church weddings get the opportunity to receive counsel regarding marriage.

About 37.8% of the participants were ACK members before they got married, meaning that it was their spouses who joined them at ACK. The other 62.2% were not members of the ACK before marriage. They came from the following churches: Roman Catholic church 25%, PCEA(Presbyterian Church of Eastern Africa) 11.7%, AIPCA(African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa) 10%, FGCK (Full Gospel Churches of Kenya) 10%, AIC(African Inland Church) 6.7%, KAG(Kenya Assemblies) of God) 5%, Other Pentecostal churches 5%, Orthodox Church 3.3%. Other churches like Salvation Army, Nairobi Pentecostal Church, Deliverance, SDA, Methodist, Baptist, CRISCO, and other Pentecostal churches recorded 1.7%, while 21.6% did not indicate the church they attended before marriage. The interdenominational couples bring much value to the ACK and can also be a link for positive ecumenical relationships and dialogue with the churches they are coming from.

It was also observed that out of the 62.2%, non-ACK women were 81.7%. The fact that the non-Anglicans were more shows that they have achieved Christian Unity by embracing their spouse's church and, in this case, the women who embraced their husband's denomination. This is in agreement with what the clergy said that during pre-marital classes, they ask the couple to talk about the church they will be attending and that, in most cases, the women join their husband's church. It could be because women, especially in Africa, adapt quickly to their husband's family; for example, in many traditional African communities, the woman could stay with her husband's family once they got married, although they would have their house.

Contribution of Interdenominational Marriages towards Christian Unity

Participants were presented with various claims regarding how their interdenominational marriages have changed their attitude and perspective regarding Christian unity. The participants' views are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Contribution of Interdenominational Marriages toward Christian Unity

S/N	Statement	N	Mean	Rank
1	Being married to a spouse from a different denomination has made it easy for me to worship comfortably together with people from a different denomination.	111	3.93	6
2	Inter-denominational married couples play a very significant role in promoting Christian unity.	111	4.10	2
3	Getting married to a spouse from a different denomination has made it easier for me to establish relationships with people of different denominations.	111	4.11	1
4	I have gained a significant understanding of the practices of other denominations since I got married to a spouse of a different denomination.	111	4.06	3
5	I have become more open to religious practices and doctrines of other denominations since I got married.	111	3.74	8
6	Getting married to a spouse of a different denomination has made me more tolerant of other people's religious beliefs and practices.	111	3.95	5
7	I freely participate in interdenominational activities.	111	3.77	7
8	Getting married to a spouse of a different denomination has increased my appreciation for the cooperation between different Christian denominations.	111	4.02	4

Table 2 shows that the mean scores for the statements are greater than 3.5. When rounded to the nearest whole number, the mean score for these statements would be 4, which represents "agree" on the Likert scale. This implies that participants agreed with all the eight statements regarding the contribution of interdenominational marriages toward the development of Christians Unity.

The third statement, 'Getting married to a spouse from a different denomination has made it easier for me to establish relationships with people of different denominations, had the highest score suggesting that the most important way in which interdenominational marriages contribute to Christian unity is by making it easier for the persons involved to establish relationships with people of a different denomination. The finding is congruent with Ciocan (2016), who observed that interdenominational marriages promote a good relationship between churches by bringing people from different churches together. Besides the couples themselves, interdenominational marriages bring together families from different churches during wedding preparation, ceremonies, children's baptism, and other ceremonies. Qualitative data also support the finding. One of the participants had this to say:

"It (the interdenominational marriage) has created awareness among members of both churches that we are all bound by the blood of Christ." (Participants Female26, Questionnaire, 2021)

"The marriage has contributed to the appreciation of diversity. We have learned that at the end of the day, love should go beyond denominational boundaries." (Participant 39, Questionnaire, 2021)

"It (the interdenominational marriages) has opened a highway for interaction, thus promoting mutual fellowship between denominations." (Participant 60, questionnaire, 2021)

However, some of the participants felt that interdenominational marriages had no benefits; for instance, when the clergy were asked if interdenominational marriages contribute to Christian unity, they had this to say:

Interviewee 7, 20/1/2021, "No, they do not; for instance, animosity experienced during the wedding brings diversity and competition."

Interview 8 Clergy for over eight years, "No, since marriage is between two people."

Interview 10 Clergy for over 15 years, "It is possible but would take a long time."

Interview 13, clergy over 11 years. 26/1/2021 "No. They are not accepted by veterans who feel they belong. They feel oppressed and their view not accepted."

Interviewee 15, clergy for over 16 years, "Yes and no Pentecostals feel like lowering their salvation by being married by an ACK spouse. If the struggle continues, it does not enhance unity, and the spouse can go back to their church."

Interviewee 14, "Not really since it normally takes time to adapt and it is normally challenging, so it takes time to enhance unity unless someone was not committed to their church."

In a different question, when the clergy were asked if they would encourage interdenominational marriages, these were some of their views:

"No, because of the many challenges the interdenominational couples face." Interviewee 4.

"No. It makes many things easy during planning for the wedding." Interviewee 7.

However, regardless of the challenges involved with interdenominational marriages, the majority of the clergy and interdenominational couples agree that interdenominational marriages are vital in enhancing Christian Unity.

Item 2, 'Inter-denominational married couples play a significant role in promoting Christian unity.' also had a high mean score of 4.10, which indicates that there was strong agreement that interdenominational couples play a central role in promoting Christian unity. This point is in line with Bowman (2013), who contended that interchurch unions have an essential role in making Christ's prayer, that all be one, into reality, and argues that ecumenical marriage is crucial in the movement towards Christian unity. This study also agrees with Pizzey (2015), who says interchurch families promote Christian Unity. Kneips (2015) and King (2007) also say that interdenominational marriages promote Christian Unity.

Interdenominational couples experience a different denomination from theirs in marriage, and this seems to change their perception of how they view other churches and come to appreciate that the church of Christ is one and rules out biases they might have had. These couples are ecumenical champions that can be emulated by Christians who are still struggling with Christian unity. When asked to explain how interdenominational marriages bring Christian unity, this is what some of the couples (from google forms) had to say:

"It opens a highway for interaction, thus promoting mutual fellowship between the denominations."

"People see that there is no superior or inferior church."

"Creates better understanding of different denominations."

"You learn to work with others."

"They foster the fact that we serve one God."

"Partners get to know about other churches."

"It makes people more tolerant and appreciates that God is one."

"They appreciate denominations from a different perspective."

"It creates acceptance and encourages diversity in serving one true God."

Some Clergy also agree that interdenominational marriages promote Christian Unity; for instance

Interviewee 2 had this to say "Yes, it becomes easy for an interdenominational couple to receive from other churches. They become sensitive –if there is prejudice, they can rule out if someone speaks against other churches and help in correcting wrong perceptions."

Interviewee 5. Clergy for over ten years, "Yes, sometimes, e.g., when pastors meet during ceremonies like weddings and funerals and pastors share alters."

Interviewee 6, 20/1/2021 "Yes. Some are positive after the wedding, especially those who get married in church."

Interviewee 9, clergy over 18 years 21/1/2021, "Yes, those who agree and attend the same church but not among those who remain interchurch since it involves attitude change."

Interviewee 11, clergy for 17 years 26/1/2021, "Yes. It depends on the one who did the counselling for them whether they affirm that we are all Christians. No, if they fall in the hands of a pastor or elders who do not understand the issue of ecumenism and make them feel they made a mistake."

Interviewee 12, 26/1/2021, "Yes, e.g., the interdenominational couple invite their friends from other churches, e.g., during Easter cantata. The ACK is an accommodative church; most mainline churches feel accommodated, even Pentecostals."

There was also strong agreement with item 4, 'I have gained a significant understanding of practices of other denominations since I got married to a spouse of a different denomination' (mean= 4.06), that the participants have gained a significant understanding of practices of other denominations since I got married to a spouse of a different denomination. This implies that another significant way interdenominational marriages contribute to Christianity is by providing an opportunity for people to learn about new denominations. This position is

consistent with Hendricks (2012), who argued that interchurch marriages allow couples to learn from each other's faith in ways that enrich their own beliefs.

"Interdenominational marriages create a better understanding of the doctrines and interpretation to ensure Christians appreciate the Word of God with some uniformity." (Participant 8, Questionnaire, 2021)

"They (interdenominational marriages) promote understanding of the other church doctrines and beliefs and make it easier to have respect and unity and understand that our destiny is in heaven." Participant 78, Questionnaire, 2021)

"Interdenominational marriages help Christians appreciate Christians from other churches and understand various doctrines, and hence you learn to accommodate each other" (Male participant 26 in 21-30 years).

Interdenominational marriages create unity through their willingness to understand each other's denominations without judging.

There was also strong agreement with item 8, 'Getting married to a spouse of a different denomination has increased my appreciation for the cooperation between different Christian denominations' (mean= 4.02), which alleges that getting married to a spouse of a different denomination has increased the participant's appreciation for the cooperation between different Christian denominations. This is congruent with Knieps (2015), who opines that interdenominational marriages are called to echo the reconciling love of God in Christ as well as the pattern of Christ's love for his church. In the covenant of marriage, interdenominational couples form one church at home, but in this case, their domestic church relates to two separate ecclesial communions. This would also agree with Shaffer (2008), who observed that as people from different denominations interact, the uncomfortable feeling brought about by different denominations disappears. Therefore, these marriages are an embodiment of Christian unity.

The clergy were also asked what value do interdenominational couples bring to their churches, and they outlined the following:

"Bring experiences they have acquired from their former churches and new ideas, for example, praise and worship, intercessory. In the departments, they bring in new ideas and instil moral values, e.g., the mother youth helped in counselling of youth which she brought from her former church" Interview 1, clergy for 19 years

Interviewee 2 outline the following as some of the benefits that interdenominational couple brings, "praise and worship, intercessory, embracing home bible cells, morality – help to initiate purity and holiness."

"Committed Christians, for example, those from the Catholic Church, are committed to attending (mitaa) home Bible cells and giving. Those from Pentecostal churches are committed to intercessory and giving. Brings clergy from different churches together. Brings ecumenism." Interviewee 4.

"New ideas- borrowing what used be done in their former churches, e.g., Catholics are committed in their home fellowships (jumuia). Brings revival, for example, praise and worship" Interviewee 5.

"Bring richness if they were active in their church depends on the background. Can add value to the praise and worship, fellowship, teaching, leaders, Sunday school as they borrow some of the practices from interdenominational couples" Interviewee 7.

"Ecumenical value-brings understanding of each other as children of God-loving each other as children of God and Christians without boundaries." Interviewee 8.

"Able to borrow practices from other churches like praise and worship- the ACK is changing and being more flexible. Accommodate others from different churches" Interviewee 9

Interviewee 10, "Diversity of talents, e.g., new ideas into the worship team, fellowships, accounts."

"Gifting, e.g., praise and worship, teaching." Interviewee 11.

"Many values, e.g., Pentecostals, are faithful givers and tithers and take good care of the pastor. PCEA is good at giving; Catholics are devoted and committed to sacraments, SDA-committed to the Sabbath. The praise and worship interact with different churches as a result of the interdenominational marriages" Interviewee 12

"Depends with one's faith and how committed they were in their former church. Those committed bring transformation in the ACK, for instance, praise and worship and the choir." Interviewee 13

"A lot, e.g., worship brought by Pentecostals, giving to the church, mode of prayers, preaching" Interviewee 14.

"They bring good practices from their churches, e.g., "mitaa" funds derive from the PCEA, cards for all giving in the church" Interview 15.

The responses from the clergy are a clear indicator that interdenominational marriages contribute to Christian Unity. Most clergies admit that interdenominational marriages have added value in their churches. For instance, the aspect of praise and worship that is new and being embraced in the ACK, especially Nakuru Diocese, has been brought by interdenominational couples from churches where praise and worship are practised chiefly in Pentecostal churches. Interdenominational couples are very crucial in integrating and enriching the worship services at the ACK. This would, in turn, enhance Christian unity; for instance, Pentecostals worship in an Anglican Church where there is praise and worship, they would feel at home and ministered to. I recall one service when a visiting speaker in an ACK Nakuru parish from a Pentecostal church confessed how he felt so much at home during the praise and worship before he began his preaching. He had to open his eyes to confirm that he was actually in an ACK church because there was much similarity with his Pentecostal church. So interdenominational couples, especially those active in their churches and who continue to be active in the ACK church, are great contributors to Christian Unity.

It was also interesting to note that the fact that most interdenominational couples (67%) in the ACK are not active in their former churches is a positive sign to show that they fully settle in their spouses' church; this is unlike interchurch couples where the IDM remain active in their former churches. This is an indicator of Christian Unity where the non-Anglican spouse fully embraces their partner's denomination.

Item 5 'I have become more open to religious practices and doctrines of other denominations since I got married.' It had the lowest score of (mean= 3.74), consistent with Pizzey (2015) who observed that doctrines divide and make ecumenical efforts difficult. Item 7, 'I freely participate in interdenominational activities' (mean 3.77), was ranked seventh. Item 1 'Being married to a spouse from a different denomination has made it easy for me to worship comfortably with people from a different denomination' mean 3.93 was ranked sixth. Item 6 'Getting married to a spouse of a different denomination has made me more tolerant of other people's religious beliefs and practices (mean 3.95) was ranked fifth. These last statements, which mainly involve doctrines, illustrate that it is hard to penetrate Christian Unity if one focuses on doctrines since Christians have attachments with their doctrines.

CONCLUSIONS

The study investigates the contribution of interdenominational marriages in enhancing Christian unity. Findings from clergy in the ACK Nakuru diocese and interdenominational couples in the ACK Nakuru archdeaconry found that interdenominational marriages positively contribute to Christian unity. According to the participants, the primary way these marriages reinforce Christian unity is by making it easier for the persons involved to establish relationships with people of a different denomination. The study also found that interdenominational marriages foster Christian unity by promoting Christian's understanding of practices of other denominations and cultivating the appreciation for the cooperation between different Christian denominations. This is possible because the interdenominational couples have achieved James Fowler's conjunctive faith stage, where they are open to learning from other denominations to enrich their faith.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study concludes that interdenominational marriages have the potential of reinforcing unity between different Christian denominations. These marriages can reinforce unity by fostering interaction between members of the different denominations and fostering the understanding and acceptance of the values and beliefs of other denominations. The leadership at the ACK and other churches in the country should embrace interdenominational marriages as a strategy for promoting Christian unity. They should adopt policies that support the inclusion of interdenominational couples and seek to recruit these couples in various church ministries as they carry diverse experiences from the churches they come from. The church councils should include interdenominational married couples in ecumenical dialogues as good examples of Christians who have overcome bias against other denominations. Pastors from both churches should conduct pre-marital counselling for interdenominational couples to make them feel accepted and enlighten them on the practices of the respective churches. Once these interdenominational couples are married, the pastor of the church they choose to attend (in this case, ACK) should have post-marital sessions with the couple to enlighten the newcomers about the Anglican way of worship and guide them on

how to adapt to it. In this way, they will feel comfortable in the new church and be involved in various church activities, contributing to ecumenism.

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