

PROFESSOR ESTHER MOMBO

Report #K06

ABSTRACT

Born and brought up in Kisii, Professor Esther Mombo (hereafter, Esther) was raised in the Quaker Church, with the strong influence of a grandmother who taught Esther to assert her own value as a woman and define her destiny rather than accept the cultural status quo. But the world outside her home was not as amenable to the equality of men and women that she had been brought up to believe in. Her calling crystallized towards challenging and changing the structures of marginalization of men and women in Christian circles. Over time, Esther has earned a reputation as a hard bargaining, counter-cultural and non-conformist leader and theologian. She has fought bruising battles to address gender in theological education, a journey that has taken different forms, from reexamining biblical narratives, to challenging the hegemony of masculinity in African cultures, to restructuring theological curriculum. She rejoices that these struggles have been productive because more women from all churches and all social categories find their way into St. Paul's lecture rooms and into serving God in churches in diverse fields. Churches that have been heavily patriarchal are changing their attitudes on roles of women in the church because some of the leaders have participated in engendering theology and ordination. Esther has not only taught in theological institutions, she has exercised various leadership roles in the ecclesial and academic scenes. She is currently the Deputy Vice Chancellor—Academic Affairs (DVCAA) at St. Paul's University.

Esther has remained single all her life and has never been ordained. She, however, is not against marriage or ordination; rather, she emphasizes that these are callings rather than pre-requisites for serving God.

BACKGROUND

Education

1. 1960s and 1970s: Primary and high school education. She attended Nyambisawa Secondary School for high school education
2. 1970s: She earned a diploma from Friends Theological College (Friends Bible college)
3. In the 80s: Earned a Bachelor of Theology from St. Paul's university
4. 1980s: Earned a Masters in Philosophy (MPhil) in Ecumenical Studies from Trinity College, Dublin UK.
5. 1994-1998: earned a Ph.D. from the University of Edinburgh: Church History. The dissertation was on the History of Quakers in East Africa.

Abbreviated Timeline of Esther's Life

1. Late 1950s: Born in Kisii district in south-western Kenya, in a family of eight siblings. When her parents moved to seek casual work in another district, she lived with her grandmother, who was a committed Christian of a Quaker denomination. Esther also acquired a strong work ethic in those formative years.

2. High school: Esther was disciplined through the Christian Union, felt a sense of calling to serve God, but later her encounter with hypocritical Christians led her to determine that she would always let her actions speak louder about her faith than her words.
3. Post-High school: Esther was determined to study law, but because her parents could not afford college, she held a short stint as an untrained teacher. She went to study at Quaker Bible School in Western Kenya for two years
4. Post-Bible school: she taught at Kapsabet Bible School for a year, and then went to St. Paul's University in Limuru to study a degree in Theology. She returned to teach at Anglican Theological College in Kapsabet, for eight and a half years, with a break to pursue an MPhil in ecumenical studies in the UK.
5. From 1994-1998 she pursued a Ph.D. in church history at the University of Edinburgh.
6. In 1999 she taught briefly as a part-time lecturer at Daystar University.
7. From 2000-2013, she has been at St. Paul's University, where she has been a lecturer of theology, the church in Africa, systematic theology, history and gender issues. She has held the positions of dean of students and deputy vice chancellor Academic Affairs (DVCAA).

Achievements

Esther is widely published in journals and book (see appendix). She writes on women's issues, evangelism, HIV/AIDS, Christian-Muslim relations, and poverty in Africa.

AS DVCAA she offers leadership in diverse areas, including administrative support of faculties; hiring and supervising senior staff and faculty, vetting and supporting all the academic programs; pursuit of vision, mission and academic goals of St. Paul; leading in research and curriculum development; policy development and strategic planning for the university's future; ensuring academic excellence and spiritual formation. This is in addition to responsibilities of teaching and research in her area of specialization. Esther travels widely on these duties.

Asked how she manages all these responsibilities, she says that she keeps in touch with issues in academia, especially in her area of study on theology and gender, collaborates a lot with colleagues, and involves the student body in decisions. She believes that someone in a leadership position should effect change, while simultaneously being creative and innovative in their work.

Some achievements while at the helm of leadership as DVCAA

- ❖ She has been a key catalyst in the development of new programs at St. Paul's including a first Masters Program in Christian Response to HIV/AIDS.
- ❖ She has pioneered in developing African Women's Theologies (AWT).
- ❖ Content diversification within existing programs to address societal issues in light of the (UN's) Millennium Development Goals;
- ❖ Expansion of St. Paul's University into new campuses to enable more students to access theological education. In addition to Limuru campus, St. Paul's now has three new and thriving campuses in the Nairobi city center, Nakuru and Machakos towns. Expansion has also included Distance and E-learning.
- ❖ She has developed partnerships and networking with international institutions that have a rich heritage in theology, business, and public health among others. These include Candler School of Theology, Emory School of Public Health, and Handong Christian University.

Partnerships are developed through collaborative research, staff and student exchange, and offering short-term courses in specialized areas.

Fraternities and Fellowships

- ❖ She is an active member of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (known as CIRCLE).
- ❖ She oversees the annual initiative on celebrating women's ordination in Kenya
- ❖ She served on the Eames Commission which produced the Windsor Report
- ❖ She served as a consultant at Lambeth 1998 and spoke at the Primates' meeting in Brazil
- ❖ She has also served on the Theological Education in the Anglican Communion (TEACH) working group, in the Inter-Anglican Doctrinal and Theological Commission.

Detailed Timeline of Esther's Life

Early and formative years

Esther Mombo was born in the 1950s in a village in Kisii in South Western Kenya, of God-fearing parents, with eight siblings. Her mother was a Quaker while her father was Seventh-day Adventist. When they got married, her father became a Quaker because that was the requirement of marriage within the Quaker tradition. Her mother had gone to school and was able to read and write, but when she was of marriageable age, she got married so that her brothers could go to school, which was the custom at the time.

Esther's parents and siblings moved to Kericho district to do casual labor so he could send his children to school. Esther's mother left her with her maternal grandmother so that she could help her with chores between school hours. The older of many other grandchildren that came to her grandma's house, Esther lived with her between primary 4 to 7 (about 8-13 years old). Esther owes her early Christian formation to her grandma, who was a Quaker who sometimes preached in the community and women's prisons. But her Christianity did not obscure her cultural background. She was a creative narrator of traditional and biblical stories. Later, Esther would read stories in the Bible, such as the story of Moses, and discover that her grandmother had altered the details to weave in moral lessons while remaining true to the main facts of the stories. Esther enjoyed living with her grandma but had to do a lot of chores including watering and feeding cows, collecting firewood and cooking before and school. This she says, shaped her ethic of working hard and taking responsibility. In spite of the hard work, she remembers those years with fondness of having all her needs met by a loving grandma. The hard work also made her determine she did not want to live in the village all her life. With the encouragement of her grandma, she determined to work hard in school and pursue a different life. Though schooling for girls was unpopular, her grandmother encouraged her to dream of a better life.

High School, Post-high school

When Esther went to boarding high school, she joined the Christian Union club where she grew strong as a Christian with the help of material from Scripture Union. She also felt a sense of calling into ministry. She also loved debate and the weekend challenge experiences. During school holidays, she would return to hard labor in the farms, a job mostly left to women while men loitered in the village square or town. She also knew that many women in the village suffered silently under domestic violence from their husbands. Although she could not name it as

such, this gender inequality made her angry. Her father was a good man who ensured that chores in the family were equally distributed between the boys and girls, and this helped shape Esther's opinion that women need not suffer. Neighbors thought that the Mombo girls were spoiled because they were not beaten and forced to do all the work. So she determined to study law in order to stand up for women.

After high school, she did not pursue law because her parents could not afford it. She moved to Nairobi with an uncle who was going to help her join college, but all she did for ten months was work as unpaid house help, looking after the family's two young children. This couple was Christian and, in fact, went to a thriving Pentecostal church. Although she did not complain, Esther hated their hypocrisy and decided she never wanted to be that kind of a Christian. At the same time, she felt sexually harassed by boys in the Buru Buru neighborhood where this family was living. As a simple girl from the village, they saw her as an object to play with. The determination to find a way to assert herself as a woman grew stronger.

After ten months she returned to the village bitter and disappointed with the Christianity of her uncle and his wife. They had not helped her go to college, and did not pay her for her hard work. It was not so much the money as that she felt devalued and diminished by her own educated, Christian relatives. Her father and mother keenly shared her disappointment. That experience had been a mirage but it made her all the more determined to pursue a dream 'to find the water'. Friends convinced her father that Esther should get into an arranged married. On hearing the story, Esther's grandma protested, and an emboldened Esther rejected the marriage arrangement.

Bible School, Teaching

Since pursuing law was out of question, Esther took a job as an untrained teacher in a Harambee (community effort) High school, for which she had to borrow a dress to attend the interview. She taught for a year and came to love her teaching job. After a year, she joined the Quaker Bible School in Western Kenya for two years, where she again felt a sense of God's calling to pursue ministry. Of course, her family felt she had become too liberalized, first refusing to get married, and secondly leaving a teaching job to study the Bible.

Afterwards, she joined St Paul's University to do a degree in Theology, where she found herself in a male-dominated environment with about three or four other women pursuing theology. The male dominance in all aspects of academic and social life was overwhelming. But she chose to remain true to her value system of honoring and respecting herself in spite of being expected to conform to chauvinistic attitudes. While she was studying, she dated, but she came to feel that marriage was not the big deal that Christians made it out to be. Eventually, her education increased the gap between her and the men that wanted to marry her. She did not make a conscious choice to remain single, but she was increasingly conscious that marriage was not for her; this despite the fact that for her generation, she was completely the odd one for being unmarried and without biological children. She is in her fifties and still unmarried. However, over time, she has raised several (foster) children who look up to her as a mother.

Upon completing her degree at St. Paul's, Esther returned to her home area to teach in a school run by the Reformed Church of East Africa, a very conservative church. Some of her all-male students would be older than her, and being small in physical stature, she continued to

experience sexual harassment from the community. She was reviled by the fact that every single woman is seen first as a sex object before she is appreciated for her work. Esther says sexual harassment in church is as bad as outside of it, especially for single women. These experiences of prejudice against her increased the resolve to help women find their rightful place in God.

Anglican Theological College, Kapsabet, M-Phil, PhD

Later, Esther was directed to apply to teach at The Anglican Theological College in Kapsabet, in the Eldoret Diocese (in Rift Valley). The then Bishop, Alexander Muge was very forward looking. He accepted her for the job, but the all-male school council rejected her for being a young unmarried woman, not entitled to teach men or to hold any leadership role in the church, and definitely not from their ethnic community. All three issues: gender, ethnicity and theology bore down on her opportunity, leading to a stalemate for six months, after which she was hired when no one else could be found with the necessary qualifications. Still, the council restricted what she could teach and where she would live, forcing her to live with the family of the parish priest. Because of the way she dressed, in (relatively) short dresses, earrings and braided hair, people, including women, treated her with suspicion, like she was not a real Christian, on top of being an outsider. On top of that, women in that community are treated as children. Esther took this diminution in stride, eventually gaining respect in her school and host community with her work ethic, her relational aptitude, and her professionalism in class. After teaching for one and a half years at Kapsabet, she got a grant to study for a masters' degree in Britain for one year. The school community had a hard time letting go.

In Britain, she pursued an M-Phil in Ecumenical Studies. She returned to the school in Kapsabet and, this time, she demanded a house of her own. The house she was given ended up becoming a place of refuge for many students who needed to talk with someone who would listen. She taught at Kapsabet for seven years. To date, a lot of clergy, some of whom are bishops, identify her as their Mwalimu (Swahili for "teacher," in this context with respectful deference).

During that time, she began questioning the absence of ordained women in the dioceses, in spite of the fact that a majority of those who patronized the churches were women. She found herself up against a very strong current of male prejudice. Over the course of seven years, she influenced women on how to tactfully speak up for their rights in the church and diocesan meetings. The problem was not only with the men. Esther realized she had to contend with women's self-denigration, the result of years and years of being on the receiving end, both culturally and ecclesiastically. Through concerted research, lobbying, and female acumen, she helped to generate theological conversations within the Eldoret Diocese. Eventually, a commission was constituted, which agreed in principle that women could be ordained. She never pursued ordination, but wanted the opportunity opened up to other women so the churches could be served effectively.

In 1994-1998, Esther returned to the UK, this time, to study Church History in the University of Edinburgh under Andrew Walls. *She researched the history of Quakers in East Africa.*

Joining St. Paul's University

In 1999, she returned to Kenya and started looking for a job. Although she had a Ph.D. she did not find it easy. The church did not know what to do with her because she was not ordained and

was not married. She held an unproductive stint of part-time teaching at Daystar University. Following an advertisement for a Ph.D. graduate at St. Paul's university, she did an interview, but once again her unmarried and un-ordained status came to haunt her. Her advantage was that she had a Ph.D., and the school was seeking University status with the Kenya Commission for Higher Education. She got the job but encountered new challenges.

Up until that time, the majority of the teaching staff at St. Paul's (1999) was predominantly white missionaries. They would raise their support from elsewhere. Enrollments were low, so there was not enough money to pay local staff and teachers. She found a very demoralized staff due to the poor terms of service, and a system with a penchant for a high turnover of local staff and lecturers. Many predicted she would not last, but money had never been Esther's motivation. As usual, she encountered marginalization. The few local women who worked at the school were in lower and poorly paid positions, but at least, they were married and had children. An expectation that a woman boss would be bossy and demanding of other women preceded her. Esther set to change perceptions through her work ethic and feminine intuition. It has been thirteen years since she joined St. Paul's, and she is a success story. But the road was rough.

Appointment as Dean at St. Paul's

In short order, she was appointed academic dean in an acting capacity after the resignation of the then dean. Opposition arose against her appointment because anyone in any significant position was ordained and married. That was the one time she wanted to quit. With a little encouragement from the Principal, she asked for a sign from God, and that was that the students would accept her appointment as a dean. The next day, dressed as her usual self (in a relatively short skirt, because the men expected her to dress in long skirts), she walked into a full chapel where she was introduced as the acting dean, to the wild applause of the students. Still, the majority of the long-serving teaching staff, who were predominantly male and white, didn't take kindly to the idea of her leadership and to the changes she begun to introduce as a dean. Particularly challenging were the first few months when she had to plan a graduation ceremony with very little cooperation from all quarters. But she dug in by principle, professionalism, sheer hard work, and a soft touch for low cadre support staff.

Breaking the glass ceiling to make theological education accessible to women

After a semester of being in an acting capacity, Esther was confirmed as Dean in a process that once again challenged her single, un-ordained status. Immediately she set about solving glaring problems in the school. The first was the low student population. She realized there were very few students joining the university because theological education was tied to ordination. To solve the problem would mean delinking the two. Students should be able to study and then look for ordination afterward or pursue other interests—after all, she had never been ordained. When she managed to solve this, the door opened for single, divorced, widowed women as well as marginalized men to come to study. The numbers immediately increased. She was accused of bringing students who were not qualified, but she was able to show the expectations had previously been unrealistic.

Secondly, the increase in the student population begun to resolve financial crises as more fees meant better terms to teachers and staff. Still, some teachers hated having to deal with large classes, so there was resistance from lecturers who had taught in the school for a long time.

Little by little, small and big changes began to be felt throughout the life of the institution. For example, whereas she had been the first African lecturer with a Ph.D., the number of African lecturers with PhDs began to grow. Presently, 95% of the teaching staff is local, and three-quarters of these staff have good terms of reference. Another example of change is the increase in female student enrollment and graduation, which shows a sharp increase between 2000 and 2012. There were five female graduates in 2000. The number of graduates picks up steadily from then, and in 2009, there were thirty-five female graduates. (These Statistics offered in the appendix of the book “If you have no voice just sing!”)

Professionalism, problem solving and the politics of otherness

In spite of the effectiveness with which she was leading as dean, or perhaps because of the hitherto sacrosanct ground she tread, the challenge of her marginalization continued. When the opportunity to get a new Principal for the school came up, the stringent restrictions outlined by the governing council preempted any possibility that Esther would apply for the position. Eventually, the Principal’s position was un-procedurally filled. Esther decided to challenge the process in principle, with the support of the student population, but to the displeasure of the governing council. The new Principal did agree with Esther that in principle the procedure through which he had been recruited was flawed. Eventually the chair of the governing council, a public personality in church circles, came and apologized to the student body that was threatening to go on strike, owning up that the process had not followed procedure. Esther and the new Principal agreed to work together for the good of the school.

When the school was granted university status in 2007, this Principal was automatically made the Vice Chancellor (VC). But although Esther was the dean, it was only through a roundabout process that she was appointed from being a dean to the position of a Deputy Vice-chancellor (DVCAA). Her qualifications and professional skills were never the issue. She says that whenever it came to strategic management of the school, it was well known that she was on top of her game. It was always the factor of *otherness*, the fact that she didn’t fit the box of a “good woman”: questioning of the male status quo, lack of ordination, and her unmarried status. The new VC stayed for a term and then moved to another university. But when he left, Esther felt that applying for the position of Vice Chancellor would lead to another showdown, so she refrained. A male colleague got the job of a new VC. Esther’s term as a DVCAA was renewed on the grounds that it would not be good to have a new VC and a new DVCAA. Her term comes to an end in 2013, after which she has requested to go on a sabbatical, and then she will return to her teaching and research responsibilities at St. Paul’s.

Impact as dean and DVCAA

Esther has given her best years at St. Paul’s. Although she has fought hard, she has enjoyed her work and has been able to see tangible difference in the lives of students and staff. Under her leadership, the student population expanded exponentially. She has also led the initiatives to expand the capacity by decentralizing the schools operations from the main center at Limuru campus, to acquiring a campus in the city center, starting centers at Machakos and Nakuru towns. This has of course been achieved in collaboration with others lecturers and leaders in the school, but it was her actions as a dean that catalyzed the growth and expansion that St. Paul’s is now enjoying. She expanded education programs, so there were more options for students other

than theology, which addressed other issues in society. She worked to remove the bottleneck of ordination so that more students could come to St. Paul's.

In the midst of all this, Esther has also been writing and publishing.

Asked why she thinks students chose her as the most influential person, she said, *"As much as I am an administrator I do a lot of pastoral work, walking with students. I give them space to share their lives with me. I have seen students, who church and society have branded useless and nothing, end up as somebody. Sometimes it means walking with them emotionally, sometimes materially. I have done all that, sitting up late to listen to them, lifting them when they were at their lowest. Though I'm not ordained, I'm a pastor at heart (and in the Quaker circles I'm known as a pastor). We worked hard to get grants for both men to study, and although there have been more women, I have also helped men. For thirteen years I have lived for this university. I'm also keen to develop young women into the CIRCLE, even allowing them to travel in my place so they can also hear the experiences of women from other cultures. That road of mentoring takes time, space other physical issues. I began a home for sometimes battered or homeless. Sometimes I take battered women in my study; I accompany them to court to give testimonies and help them get out of marriages that are destructive for them. I don't believe in people dying in marriage, so if it is not working before if it is already dead marriage, you rather leave while you are alive. These controversial things don't make me popular. There are churches that do not allow me to preach because they are afraid I will challenge their gender discrimination. But any opportunity that I am given, I will make sure I walk with women and the marginalized men. This, I think is what has touched some people's lives, and they think I've influenced them. I'm surprised, but I'm glad to know that though I have made enemies, I have so many friends."*

Information about the Preparation of this Report

Report Prepared by Maggie Gitau

APPENDIX I

Excerpts of Esther Mombo's Writings

1. “Mentoring Younger Scholars in Theological Education in Africa”

Esther considers mentoring as the single most powerful vehicle for transferring learning and life experiences to the younger generation. Mentoring requires multiple and concerted efforts: formal training, education, coaching, counseling, and having protégés (specially chosen people to whom to pass on specific skills at a more personal level). It is crucial to personal and leadership development of a younger generation.

This particular paper examines how mentoring of women has taken place at St. Paul's university (through her pioneering leadership in collaboration with others, although she doesn't point to herself as the leaders of this initiative).

- ❖ The first woman theologian joined St. Paul's in 1903 but she could not be admitted to the Divinity class for men so she was admitted to the wives' class, intended to prepare women to run Christian families alongside the ministry of their husbands.
- ❖ In 1976, Mildred Achola was admitted from Uganda, as an unmarried woman, to study theology with the men. She was later joined by Nyambura Njoroge, who became the first ordained woman in Presbyterian Church of East Africa. Both of them had a hard time; teaching was male-dominated. The content of theological education was not relevant to needs of their communities or churches. Because of their jaded experiences, they both committed to mentoring other women.
- ❖ 1976-1999, the numbers of female students at St. Paul's ranged from 2-6 students each year, compared to that of men at about 25 each year. Theology was linked to ordination, in spite of the fact of pews full of women.
- ❖ From 2000, things began to change because of intentional gender consideration (engendering) of theological education. There were two movements of engendering theological education in Africa:
 - 1988-1998: Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women: to empower women to challenge oppressive structures, to affirm contributions of women, to give visibility to women's perspectives and actions in the struggle for justice, peace and integrity of creation;
 - The Circle of the Concerned African Women Theologians (Circle), launched in 1989 in Accra, Ghana. It is an ecumenical and interfaith body of African women theologians tracing their background to a number of other theological organizations in Africa, but the Circle was different in that it created room for women from other religious traditions, not just Christians. The aim is to empower women to study and write theology, through re-reading their theological sources, critique of African culture, interfaith issues and addressing HIV/AIDs. The circle was inaugurated at St. Paul's in 2000. At that time there were only 10 women among 100 men in the university.

- ❖ When the Circle was inaugurated, a formal mentoring process for women began, through, 1) encouraging women to study theology by delinking it from ordination 2) re-reading the Bible from women's perspective, and 3) looking at African cultural practices critically
- ❖ Previously, women were judged according to their social location or marital status. Those who were married had to justify their calling in regards to the position of their husbands, and had to obtain approval from them to study theology. For the singles, it was feared they would get married in the course of their studies, abandoning their sending churches. The single mothers, widows and physically handicapped (or differently-able) faced social stigma that ruled them out of theological class. In order to bring these women to study theology it was necessary to break these glass ceilings. Part of that task was challenging the underlying fears concerning female sexuality in patriarchal societies of both the bible and the African culture, which are skewed towards exclusion of women.
- ❖ Unlinking theological education from ordination required 1) change of policy at St. Paul's, which took many complex negotiations in a system that had been wedded to the status quo for nearly a century 2) a steep personal struggle to change attitudes of both men and women on this issue. Esther faced the challenges with an uncompromising conviction that gave her the stamina to keep going.
- ❖ Esther did the sheer hard work of writing a theological curriculum whose structure and content could be incorporated into the mainstream of education at St. Paul's. It required adding of units, clarifying theological vision and offering content that was relevant to issues that both the men and women studying at St. Paul's could identify with.
- ❖ Tamar Campaign: A case of incest and violence against Tamar, it originates from the story in 2 Samuel. Tamar is viewed as a symbol of the violence against women, but also a symbol of strength because she spoke out. St. Paul's launched this campaign in association with the Fellowship of Christian councils in the great lakes and the horn of Africa. As part of engendering education by breaking silence regarding physical, spiritual, mental and verbal abuse of children and women, which is rampant in the region. Over the years, the campaign has carried out many activities, including raised grants to help women pursue theological education at St. Paul.

As shown through the above process, Esther sees mentoring as 1) creating space for women to enter into theological education, 2) walking with the women during their studies through a formally designed curriculum as well as personal relationships. 3) Mentoring also means transferring professional knowledge, technical expertise, and organizational awareness. This requires that they are placed in groups that identify their social location, the accompanying forms of discrimination, exclusion, violence and their needs. These groups are single women, single mothers, widows, married women, women with disability and women with HIV/AIDs.

2. Gender Theology: a summary of the article “From the Pew to the Pulpit: engendering the pulpit through teaching ‘African Women Theologies (AWT)’”

This paper is based in one of the courses offered at St. Paul’s since the curriculum was redesigned. The course goes by the title of African Women’s Theology (AWT). The content is based on survey research in churches that shows the rates of church attendance between men and women, versus church leadership.

- ❖ Kenyan churches have more women than men, but men usually occupy the front (the leaders’) seats and pulpits. Up to 70- 80% of most churches are made up of women, but they are virtually absent when it comes to leadership positions, to be seen, not heard. However, this status quo is taken for granted by both men and women.
- ❖ Women do what are considered “minor jobs” of caring, cooking or teaching children; they are active in fundraising but have little access to decision making processes, and little say in how the money is used. (The history of St. Paul’s points to a big discrepancy: Women who studied theology remained in the margins of church leadership. Conservative biblical interpretations within patriarchal societies kept them from being ordained). Men are socialized to be public figures, women are socialized for the domestic sphere.
- ❖ Teaching on gender is not enough to change the discrepancy. Engendering education means opening it up for all the people of God regardless of their social status.
- ❖ Also the whole structure of theological education needs to be a gender sensitive curriculum that includes female perspectives on theologies of health, wealth and property, power, masculinity, equity and laws.

Once the students have this awareness of gender imbalance in church, critical analysis of the issues can follow. Women students are encouraged to voice their perspectives.

The chapter outlines how AWT course is conducted. Teaching “Gender in Africa” is one of many steps in tackling the injustices of patriarchy and male dominance in church and in theological education. Practical as it can get, the course aims to develop an understanding of AWT, a scrutiny of the environments in which African women do their theologies: cultural, religious, political, social and economic. Then it equips them to participate fully in the life of the church at all levels.

The course is strategically placed in the third year of a study (for bachelor’s degree students), so that the students are already exposed to church history, pastoral care, theology, hermeneutics and other courses. Secondly, it begins by addressing fears, motivations, expectations of the students, creating a robust environment of critical scrutiny of the issues. Students fill in questionnaires that reveal their expectations, fears, and motivations. The fears revolve around four issues: 1) authority of the Bible, 2) the teachings of the church, 3) the place of the family in society 4) the theological correctness of the course, whether it is biblical, if it will challenge men’s leadership, if social relationships—marriage, family—will be compromised by the ‘empowered’ woman, if this is an agenda imposed on the church in Africa from the west.

Class content and teaching methods are designed with these issues in mind. Content delivery is through personal narratives, stories that help to move from abstraction to reality. The other

method is to reexamine biblical stories from a woman's perspective, with the cultural contexts of those stories in mind. Most students are shocked when they closely examine stories of violence against women in the Bible, and discover these stories as reports of what took place, not as the norm or the word of God on how to treat women. Students acquire vital hermeneutical skills. This then leads to a critical examination of church treatment of women, as well as cultural attitudes and practices.

What is remarkable is that at the end, men cite the course as having opened their eyes on theological and practical issues towards women. Women feel free to disagree with domineering perspectives.

3. “If you have no voice, just sing: narratives of women’s lives and theological education at St. Paul’s University”; Edited by Esther Mombo and Heleen Joziase, a lecturer at St. Paul’s in the field of gender, theology.

This book introduces the history of women and theological education at St. Paul's, and then narrates the life stories of fifteen women. These very personal stories show how social status of the women has had a direct impact on their experiences in church and society. These experiences are diverse, from social pressure, isolation, sexual harassment, physical, emotional and verbal violence and stigma. Esther and Heleen use these stories to point out some of the challenges that women face. The stories are also a beacon of hope, showing that in spite of challenges that they face, women who are given space to pursue theological education in a gendered curriculum (at St. Paul's) do end up serving humanity in significant ways and/ or living as full participants in God's mission on earth in spite of their social status. Esther's joy is that while the journey to making theological education accessible to women has been hard, these women and many other untold stories are signs of hope that things in the church in Africa are changing.

APPENDIX II

Some of Professor Esther Mombo's Research and Publications

1. Esther Mombo "Mentoring Younger Scholars in Theological Education in" In *A handbook of Theological Education in Africa* (Eds) Isabel Apawo Phiri and Deitrch Wener Cluster Publications 2013. 853-857.
2. Esther Mombo and John Chesworth "From St. Paul's United Theological College to St. Paul's University- A story of Theological Education from Kenya." In *A handbook of Theological Education in Africa* (Eds) Isabel Apawo Phiri and Deitrch Wener Cluster Publications 2013. 893-901.
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