

*(Draft—not for publication or citation)*

## The public vocation of Lutheran churches

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*Definition of Vocation:* The idea of vocation, has its root in Latin. Vocare, means “to call”. It summons, binds to a particular form of service, it describes both secular and religious commitments. Some persons called to serve in religious order and others to serve faithfully in a given community.

**Introduction:** As a point of departure on this presentation, I would like to reflect on Martin Luther the Reformer from whom the Lutheran churches originated. The notion of vocation as a call from God to do a certain kind of work owes a great deal to Martin Luther. According to him, faith in Christ alone matters and works alone are empty. Luther rejected the division between sacred and secular spheres on which the medieval church’s understanding of calling was predicated. His understanding of vocation as service of God to a neighbour was revolutionary. However, nowadays vocation is domesticated and ignored. Luther’s teaching on the theological significance of vocation had the effect of broadening the concept. He argued that “vocation” should not refer exclusively to monastic calling, for even the occupations of lay people are vocations. On the basis of the word of God, Luther wrote, “we pronounce the sure convocation that the way of life of a servant, which extremely live in sight of the word it is far more acceptable to God than all the orders of monks.” This is closely related to Luther’s position that faith and not works is salvific. As theologian Karlfried Froehlich puts it, “through his bold theological move of equalizing the value of all work before God, Luther was responsible for the secularization” of the idea of vocation. He encouraged lay people to think of themselves as part of the priesthood of all believers, and thus see their jobs as vocations in the sense that their work was blessed by God. The job of pastor is necessary for good order, but should not be elevated above the other work. According to Luther vocations are God’s masks on the face. We see the ordinary human face, we see our mother, the doctor, teacher, the waitress, pastor but beneath the appearances, God is ministering to us through them. God is hidden in human vocations. Spouses, parents, children, employers, citizens, and the rest, God is working through us even when we do not realize it. When we fulfill our calling we too are masks of God. God works through people, in their ordinary stations of life to which he has called them, to care for creation. He cares for all Christians and non Christians whom he has given life. To a couple God creates new life through it. The miracle continues when they bring the child for baptism then God cares for the child through the parents. The purpose of vocation according to Luther, is to love and serve the neighbour (Mark 12:20-31). Gustav Wingren, in his classic book *Luther on vocation*, summarized “God does not need our good works but our neighbour does.” Erick Kaestina (1899 – 1974) “whom God assigns power he first deprives of his mind.” Lutheran vocations see priests in the world and elect leaders who know themselves as ministers of God. In our vocations as citizens, to serve our fellow citizens, in need of good public policies. In Public vocation God called physicians to bring His healing to patients not kill them. In the same manner God did not call businessman to cheat their customers, but to provide for their needs. Vocations extend even to government officials, they are not called to oppress their citizens, but to protect them. God is masked in our neighbour. When our neighbour is sick, hungry, thirsty, naked a prisoner, a stranger- Christ himself is hidden. “In as much as ye have done it unto one of least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me (Matthew 24:40).

What is the way forward towards transformative perspectives and practices today in the public vocation of Lutheran churches? We need to create a theology that speaks to different contexts. For example what can the Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe learn from the Lutheran church in Sweden? Or what can the Lutheran church in America learn from the Lutheran church in South Africa? By so doing cross-cultural and cross-contextual theology is being built and solidified. We do not only end there we extend this vision to the academy dimension. What can the Lutheran intellectuals in Zimbabwe church learn from the intellectuals of Lutheran institutions in Tanzania? How does theological education have an impact in community? By so doing we learn from one another. There is integration of intellectual rigor in the life of the church and practical demonstration in the life of the world.

What role does the church play in the public sphere? Therefore public vocation of the Lutheran churches takes off from Jesus who said, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." In this understanding, the role of the church in the public sphere is that of mission. In "Missio Dei", the church is not only satisfied by witnessing to its own setting but to reach out to the society in different cultures and traditions; a church that is prepared to enter into other worlds, working for change. Lutheran churches in public vocation as a body of Christ is men and women participating in God's Mission as equals, Gal 3:28. However it should be noted that vocation is sometimes abused into passive justification of status quo or even acting as a cover for injustice. In Lutheran churches in Africa the question of culture and gender needs to be critically engaged with. The public vocation of Lutheran churches is inclusive because it asserts that God is hidden in earthly governments, protection through police, firemen, teachers, doctors, librarians, parents, pastors, cleaners, waiters only to name a few. No matter how humble is your work, God is at work. That is why I have already mentioned that vocations would be understood as mask of God. On the surface we see human but beneath is God ministering.

In light of what I have said above I wish to challenge the Lutheran Church to broaden their horizon on public vocation to include ministry to prison, with particular focus to ex-female prisoners to which I now turn. Prisons are microcosm of broader society. They reflect the socio-cultural, economic, religious and political problems of society. What can the Lutheran Church do in response to this phenomenon? Preaching justification by faith to criminals, Jesus our role model, said to the man who was on the right side on the cross, 'today you will be with me in paradise'. Solidarity with those in prison and to ex-prisoners calls for fraternal help so that they can resume their place in society both professionally and emotionally. And Jesus' challenge to the Lutheran Church today comes from Matthew 25:35-46, *I was in prison and you did not visit me ...*

### **My story**

From 2003 to 2006 I worked as a prison chaplain in Zimbabwe. There was not a single day when Lutheran group visited the prisoners as part of their vocation, as other churches did. So what I am trying to point out is that if our public vocation does not start with the neighbour within our own community, how possible would it be to the other parts of the world? The public vocation of Lutheran Churches is only possible if we link this interconnectedness showing love and stretching a helping hand to the neighbour and to the world. How can we render this helping hand? I find myself drawn back to the prison ministry where the Lutheran church in Zimbabwe is not directly involved. How then can the Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe participate in public vocation among the prisoners? How can it participate in empowering female ex-prisoners in finding their way back into society as they find it very hard to integrate into society?

## **The plight of female ex-prisoners**

Having worked at the above mentioned female prison and having interacted with many prisoners, I observed that many female prisoners exhibited the emotion of fear of being reintegrated into society after their release because of the uncertainty that awaits them. This is a common feeling of all prisoners about to be released, but it carries special weight for African female prisoners because of the patriarchal expectations of women within the African culture. The dominant question asked by the female prisoners was: “Everyone says that prisons are for men, how am I going to explain my being imprisoned? As observed by Padel and Stevenson (1988), most female ex prisoners have to start afresh to make new relationships as their relatives do not want to identify with them.

I witnessed a further complication as they requested for letters to take back home to their families and churches as a proof of changed life after imprisonment. The female prisoners, feared stigmatization and discrimination coupled with economic challenges that are cultural and gender based. It is this complex relationship between gender and culture that must be attended to if a comprehensive rehabilitation process for former prison inmates is to be achieved. The cultural norms and gender stereotypes in this context do not see woman as capable of committing crime. Once labelled as a “criminal, women are entirely lost to shame” (Dobash and Gutteridge 1986: 109). It has been observed that because of the fear of such stigmatization, “female prisoners act more like mad women unable to think judiciously” with the hope to find sympathy (Dobash and Gutteridge 1986: 109). In so doing the woman is only acting out the label the society has given her.

The female ex-prisoners are in a double bind because they are rejected by both the church and society for having committed crime. They need the society due to the African worldview that puts value and emphasis on belonging to a community. Msomi (2008: 2) points out the importance of restoring *ubuntu*, (humanness) which is also the main focus in pastoral care. The importance of restoring life and healing from African cultural traditions is understood as a communal activity. Mbiti (1969:108) has explained further asserts that whatever happens to an individual happens to the whole group. In this context, it should be the passion of the Church to restore full life through the empowerment of ex-prisoners, who have been excluded, dehumanized, marginalized, and disenfranchised ( Ramsay 2004:82) so that they can be restored to their communities with dignity. One of the propositions is to provide educational programs to prisons as a way of rehabilitating prisoners.

## **Education Ideas**

In this vocation the proposition for providing educational programs in prisons as a way of rehabilitating prisoners is in agreement with Macguire (2002:114) who says that “ideal rehabilitation” is achieved through applying educational strategies and giving social support that address problems which are linked to an individual’s needs. This view sees rehabilitation as constituting awareness building because in most cases the woman in prison is not aware of the complex patriarchal forces that oppress her. She just thinks she is in prison because she committed a crime. She can not notice the gender and cultural fetters that have placed her into this cycle of bondage. I however agree with Ngubane’s public vocation on education because Luther and his colleagues struggled to create an educational system and a curriculum for church, school and the university, for both

young people and adults. Education's purpose is to bring understanding of both freedom and responsibility. Education is a right to all human beings.

Thus public vocation on education is very important because during my work in prisons some church organizations paid fees for prisoners and they wrote their exams at "O" level and degree level while in prison. Luther wrote that the greatest wealth of any society is in its well educated citizens. Connecting education and vocation, Luther emphasized that it is only through education that we discover our gifts, our callings and our individual public vocations. Scholl also argues that, today we must educate all in ways that empower them, that encourage them to believe that one individual can indeed make a difference in the world.

### **Pastoral care from a woman's perspective**

As an African woman clergy in the Lutheran tradition, who has worked as a chaplain for female prisoners in an ecumenical environment, it is where my deep commitment to pastoral care for African women who have served sentences in prison for one reason or another emerged. It is this commitment that has compelled me to reflect from a theological perspective the experiences of ex-prisoners. I have chosen to carry out my studies with female ex-prisoners at The South African National Institute for Crime Prevention and Reintegration of Offenders into Society (NICRO), in Durban so that I can propose a program for their rehabilitation and integration into society using pastoral care from a woman's perspective. Since there are gendered cultural and religious experiences that contribute to the difficulties faced by female ex-prisoners to reintegrate in society after release, I propose that constructing a gender-sensitive pastoral care rehabilitation program for ex-prisoners will help in the process of integrating them back into the society.

When we talk of the rehabilitation of female ex-prisoners, I would like to reflect on the words of Nikkel, (2008: no page number) of Prison Fellowship International who said that:

Imprisonment represents utter inability of society to offer any way out other than punishment, separation and incarceration. Society cannot make bad people good by forcibly warehousing them in institutions populated with other bad people. Individuals who have acted irresponsibly cannot be made responsible by taking away responsibility and freedom away from them. Take away hope from a person and you will profoundly affect the person's will to live a productive and meaningful life.

Furthermore, the work of Judith Worell and Pam Remer (1992:5) shows scientific discovery into the prevalence of "depression, anxiety, panic ..." among women and this would be even more for those women in transition from prison to ordinary life. It is out of this context that constructing a rehabilitation program for female ex-prisoners will counteract the dominant discourses of vengeance, bitterness, fear and hopelessness and strengthen the voice of forgiveness, inclusion, care, community, trust and hope in the healing and mending of society. Judith Worell and Pam Remer also show why it is necessary to provide therapy which is specifically suited for women in the light of new information about women and their lives in contemporary society. According to Pattison (1997:242), it is feminists who are challenging the patriarchal oppression of women when pastoral needs of oppressed women are ignored. Through the eyes of women and social analysis of female ex-prisoners' position of exclusion, I am motivated to participate in the construction of a rehabilitation program that promotes life rather than denying it.

A number of works have been written in the last few years concerning this matter, although none is written from a theological and feminist pastoral care approach. Some examples are: Munnik (1995), Gayle (1997) and Gondor (1996). Most of the literature available only focuses on women and crime without offering any way out of the cycle of bondage (Daly 1994:84). Such work does not take interest in how these could be rehabilitated other than to point out that women commit less crime than men. Other studies focus on prison ministries, such as visiting the prisoners and connecting prisoners with the families (Kandle and Cassler 1968:83 and Gorsuch 1998). The church and society are challenged to get “involved in the restoration and healing of society by demonstrating practical care for those imprisoned and a commitment to reintegration of released prisoners into communities of care” (Buckie 2006:67ff). Buckie’s challenge falls short of examining the pastoral needs from a gendered perspective in order to meet the fears of female prisoner or ex prisoners.

The critical analysis into how feminist pastoral care will be employed in the rehabilitation of female ex-prisoners as part of public vocation. It is a critical study because the rehabilitation of ex-prisoners is both a complex and sensitive undertaking requiring a clear and compassionate approach. The main question for the study is therefore: “How does feminist Pastoral care facilitate the rehabilitation of female ex-prisoners for their integration into the society?”

The process of answering this question generates other key questions based on: issues around how women’s identities are constructed by their culture and religious traditions, which influence the way they are treated by the society and how women internalize the society’s perception of women; an understanding of rehabilitation needs of women; empowerment of female ex prisoners through a rehabilitation program that is gender sensitive. A series of these key questions will include:

How do the cultures of the women in the sample of this study construct the identities of women?

How do the religious traditions of the women in the sample of this study construct the identities of women?

How do women in the sample perceive themselves and the society where they are to be integrated?

What are feminist theories and methodologies of anthropology, African cultural hermeneutics and pastoral care?

What are the theories of rehabilitation? How does it interface with feminist pastoral care?

What theological lessons does this study draw which can be used to construct a program for the rehabilitation of female ex prisoners?

With these questions in mind, this study will therefore aim to meet the following objectives:

To provide a gendered analysis of the cultural construction of the identity of women of this study;

- To provide a gendered analysis of the religious construction of the identity of women of this study;
- To explore and analyze the way ex female prisoners of this study perceive themselves and the society where they are to be integrated;
- To reflect and analyze feminist theories and methodologies of anthropology, African cultural hermeneutics, pastoral care in relation to the empowerment of female ex prisoners;
- To assess rehabilitation theories and examine how they can interface with feminist pastoral care methodologies in relation to the experiences female ex prisoners;
- To suggest a way forward by proposing the construction of a gender sensitive program for the rehabilitation of female ex prisoners that they can be empowered to go back into the society with dignity.

Thus, the question of the construction of a rehabilitation program for female ex-prisoners in the African context requires an understanding of the following:

#### **Societal perceptions on women in Africa:**

A feminist approach to female ex-prisoners finds its first hurdle in the traditional view that associates crime or “criminology with men” (Gelsthorpe and Morris 1990:3). In this gender-organized play-field, girl-children would be “penalized for behavior which was condoned, if not encouraged, for boys” (1990:3). So the first task of this nature of research is to deconstruct this kind of thinking, especially in the African context where these gender stereotypes are not contested. This research seeks to reveal such general societal perceptions and show how problematic they are in the process of reintegration of female ex-prisoners. Of interest here will be the role of stereotypes involving issues like crime. What are the common views on women who are convicted of crime? This needs investigation since there could be a common perception that a woman who commits convictable crime is now in the domain of men’s roles (Rakoczy 2004:10). Patriarchy is an “ideology, a way of thinking, feeling and organizing human life which legally, politically, socially and religiously enforces male dominance and power” (Rakoczy 2004:18). Patriarchy in society and culture, “is initiated by men, and has men as its principal beneficiaries”. Studies in feminist pastoral care focus on the critique of patriarchy. Thus in the process of rehabilitating female ex-prisoners there is need to deconstruct these patriarchal societal perceptions so that the ex-prisoner does not remain subjugated under them (Aina 1998:73). This is the initial stage of emancipation of ex-prisoners.

#### **Use African feminist pastoral resources to formulate liberating rehabilitation processes for female ex-prisoners:**

Rakoczy (2004:107) has demonstrated the biblical precedence of women ministry in the early church and how it is suppressed through the “power of patriarchy”. Other African women theologians (such as Oduyoye and Kanyoro (1992), Oduyoye (1995), Phiri (1997), Njoroge (2000), Dube (2001), Kanyoro (2002), etc) have also emphasised the need for exposing the patriarchal nature of women oppression in Africa. As long as men and women are defined unequally, the control of social ills will prove to be a challenge (Dube 2001: 43). While men are part to the solution, it is women who should

be at the forefront of freeing other women from a complex oppressing system of women in Africa (Phiri 2005:5).

If a women-sensitive program is to be designed, it must take seriously the contributions of feminist scholars in the area of pastoral care. Women experiences have, historically, been analyzed through the eyes of men because of male domination in the African culture (Oduyoye 2001:12). So in providing a liberating life giving rehabilitation program, the oppressive nature of African culture and the cultures of their religions needs to be exposed as one root cause of ex-prisoners fears of stigmatization and material dispossession (Kanyoro 2002:59). Rehabilitation processes include practical ways of reinstating a member into constructive participation in society (Ngubane 2007:7). As such, this research aims at finding possible practical ways in which the female ex-prisoner can find way back into society with dignity. The hope is that these theological resources from African women theologians can be used to come up with practical ways of rehabilitating female ex-prisoners. This will include life affirming elements of African culture like the concept of Ubuntu as described by Msomi (2008)

Beyond the hurt, guilt, suffering, and oppression of women, there are possibilities of transformation, healing, forgiveness, reconciliation in proclaiming release to the captives letting prisoners go free (Lester 2003:3). This program is significant in empowering female ex- prisoners through feminist pastoral care, which recognizes the dignity of all human beings. Thus feminist pastoral care sees ministry as a means of liberation of one another. Female to female ministry allows relationships of women to generate “mutual empowerment” (Ruether 1983:207). In this understanding, males and females are considered as equals (Jaggard and Young 1991:106). Beyond the sense of punishment in prison, this rehabilitation and reform implies therapy to female ex-prisoners. As noted above, there is very little research done on this particular topic and this study aims to contribute knowledge about released female prisoner and their integration into society.

## Conclusion

The integration process of female ex-prisoners is made complex by the cultural issues and stereotypes that must be pastorally and theologically attended to before the whole exercise is undertaken. As mentioned at the beginning of this study, the church is challenged to take up this task of rehabilitating prisoners if it has to show its light in the world.

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