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Rethinking local ecumenism in Mberengwa in Zimbabwe through the social construct of *ukama* of the Karanga people

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Ecumenism refers to church or denominational relations and fellowship that seeks to maintain its nature of unity and oneness. Such movement is regarded as communion or cooperation that involves a visible unity with churches working together at different levels. Ecumenism takes different forms depending on the participants, location and purpose. Thus, there is conciliar ecumenism formed by the elite, namely the clergy and theologians who sit in the council of churches *vis-à-vis* the grassroots ecumenical engagement by the clergy and laity in local congregations. Usually, the aims and modus operandi are always different. Conciliar ecumenism refers to a top-down approach, while local ecumenism is a bottom-up approach that seeks to fulfil the spiritual and socio-economic needs of local rural communities. Local congregations' ecumenism is usually guided by social-cultural setting of the people. *Ukama* is a Karanga social construct that emphasises relatedness in life. The aim of this article is to demonstrate that some of the tenets of *ukama*, such as communal living, hospitality and cooperation, can promote local ecumenism. The article seeks to discuss local congregational ecumenical engagement in Mberengwa in relation to the Karanga concept of *ukama*. This article is based on literature analysis exploring the significance of the ethic of *ukama* in relation to local ecumenism. It begins by discussing the tenets of *ukama* and then connects them with some theological views of ecumenism.

Contribution: This article seeks to discuss how the church can learn from the local social construct to engage in ecumenism. In this article, I conclude that cooperation by local congregations in times of crisis and their fellowship form part of ecumenism from below, influenced by *ukama*, and the church can harness this concept to strengthen its unity.

Keywords: church; congregation; ecumenism; Karanga; Mberengwa; *ukama*.

Introduction

The church has been divided since the first century, and church[1] divisions continue to be noticeable when churches fail to have one voice in matters such as politics and justice, especially in the Zimbabwean context. The different ecumenical councils since the Jerusalem Council (Ac 15) to the World Council of churches were meant to try and address issues threatening church divisions. The division continued until Christianity became known in three different strands, namely the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant and Evangelical churches. Other forms of church groupings such as Pentecostal, neo-Pentecostal and African indigenous churches (AICs) came out of the major denominational groupings. In Zimbabwe, efforts are being made to bring churches together to work in various ways such as theological training. Churches should come together to address people's socio-economic and political needs. Such ecumenical efforts are particularly visible at national institutional level through bodies such as the Catholic Bishops' Conference (CBC) for Roman Catholics, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) for Protestants, the Evangelical Fellowship in Zimbabwe (EFZ) for Evangelicals and other Pentecostal churches as well as the Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe, Africa (UDACIZA). They come together when addressing the national socio-economic and political issues under the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD). This conciliar ecumenism has done so using pastoral letters. However, these groupings do not represent all the denominations in Zimbabwe, but only a few churches. Besides theological tools, the church can harness local cultural resources to enhance its ecumenical engagement. The article argues that *ukama* among the

1. Church in this article refers to different denominational formations and ecumenical groupings. It is used interchangeably with denomination.

Karanga has some tenets linked to Christian values that can influence local ecumenical engagement. The article is literature-based utilising secondary sources such as books, journal articles and dissertations.

Landscape of denominations in Mberengwa

In Mberengwa, there are different AICs. Most of them came from mainline churches, but they split into smaller groups because of internal disagreements. These are the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), Zion, and Johane Marange, Johane Masowe and Mugodi Apostles and smaller denominations such as Jekenisheni, Hambakuku, Zvapupu, Chiedza Chavatendi, Mataramhashu and the recently formed Madzibaba. Some of these initiated churches came about because of an effort to link Christianity and African culture (Shoko 2007). They mainly focus on addressing sickness and other problems of a spiritual nature. Among former missionary protestant churches are the United Methodist Church, Free Methodist Church, Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, Anglican Church, Brethren in Christ Church, Church of Christ, Dutch Reformed Church (Reformed Church in Zimbabwe) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe. These came into being as a result of a western missionary project. In 1934, missionaries came to Zimbabwe and divided Zimbabwe into missionary zones to avoid the crisis of clashes because of sheep stealing (Söderström 1984). Each denomination was allocated a specific area or province of operation. They focused on preaching the gospel and establishing mission stations including schools and hospitals. One may argue that the boundaries set by missionaries were importing division and denominationalism unknown in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular. Zimbabwean Christians were divided into specific churches in such a way that they were defined with such denominations in different regions. If one crosses these denominational regions and boundaries, one becomes a foreigner among his or her own people. These boundaries were crossed because of urbanisation and industrialisation when towns and cities in Zimbabwe expanded. People migrated from one missionary zone to the other areas for economic reasons thereby carrying their denomination into that urban centre.

The other group of churches is the Evangelical churches. The group consists of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. While the Apostolic Faith Mission came from South Africa, many other Pentecostal churches are home-grown break-away movements, which make up Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe (Matikiti 2017:139). Pentecostal churches include the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM), Family of God (FOG), Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) and many other charismatic churches called neo-Pentecostal and prophetic movements (Chitando & Biri 2016). These include the United Family International Church (UFIC), Prophetic Healing and Deliverance (PHD), the Good News Church (Spirit Embassy) and Christ Embassy. While they may embrace some aspects of Karanga culture,

Pentecostals reject memorial services and unveiling of the tombstone as they associate these church rites with rituals of ancestral veneration and *kurova guva* (Hove 2020). They focus on addressing the socio-economic issues of their members through healing, exorcism and deliverance services. They preach and prophesy against curses, failures and promise prosperity. They deal with every form of spiritual curse believed to cause loss, failure and all forms of human suffering. Lastly, there are the Roman Catholic Church and Seventh-day Adventist Church. These are stand-alone giants. With a cursory glance at these denominations, one could easily sense the division of the church and community in Zimbabwe. Therefore, there is need for ecumenical engagement.

Local ecumenism

Local ecumenism is the grassroots ecumenism at local congregations. In some instances, they do not have permanent structures to run their fellowships, but church leaders and members intermittently invite their congregations for fellowship with one another or come together and work together in times of crisis such as death and burial of loved ones. Members of local denominations work together in community development projects as they pool resources together to sustain their families (Hove 2020). Local congregations invite one another for evangelism, revival programmes as well as pulpit exchange programmes as a way of strengthening local ecumenism. In that process, churches and local people find one another, come together and work together. This is grassroots or bottom-up ecumenism that involves traditional and denominational boundary crossing (Hove 2020). According to Koopman (2013), local or grassroots ecumenism is more progressive because of its inclusiveness as the clergy and laity engage in worship, evangelism and serving the community. Chitando and Biri (2016) emphasise that ecumenism seeks to unite churches despite denominational backgrounds and doctrinal differences. According to Bria (2003):

> Ecumenism does not mean erasing the doctrinal divergences and cultural tensions created by 'non-theological factors', but to reset confessional and cultural particularities in their historical, local and universal context, to find a 'catholic' space of communion and solidarity, to inspire an evolution towards a synthesis in the form of a consensus. (p. 88)

As alluded to earlier on in this article, Zimbabwean Christians were divided because of denominationalism that created missionary boundaries in 1934. These imported divisions continued to grow owing to further formations of local break-away AICs and Pentecostal movements emerging from mainline denominations.

Divisions are unavoidable because of denominational traditions and doctrinal differences. While efforts are made to use theological education[2] to bring together various

2.Mainline churches train their pastors at United Theological College in Harare while some evangelical churches train their pastors at Harare and Bulawayo Theological Colleges and Bible Colleges.

denominations, the efforts seem lacking in bringing people of local congregations together. The limitation of theological education is through the emphasis of differences rather than the common goal of the body of Christ, which is faith in Christ. Unity in diversity needs to be celebrated as the church preaches Christ, love and service to the neighbour. The other weakness is that churches do not have common theological education, institutions and programmes. Other denominations such as apostolic and Zion movements do not have training colleges at all. This weakens the understanding of ecumenism among the different churches. Bria (1985) argues that:

> For Churches that do not have a proper ecumenical experience, ecumenical convergences can occur as something imposed from outside. There are situations in which the church authority does not allow ecumenical perceptions and experiences to reach the level of believers and parish communities. The question is therefore whether, currently, the laity is trained, excluded or denied in this process of reception. (p. 133)

Bria's argument demonstrates how the laity in local congregations seems to be undermined by the establishment of conciliar formations. Ecumenism seems to be acceptable when it is held by councils at national level and instituting programmes and projects in congregations without consulting them. At a conciliar level, efforts are made to bring churches together in addressing socio-economic and political challenges.[3] Earlier I argued that the national or conciliar ecumenical engagement is not representative of all churches in local congregations and communities. These national bodies focus mainly on addressing national economic and political matters (Hove 2020). Given the number of denominations and various formations, there is need for a receptive and progressive ecumenical engagement among these churches. This article seeks to explore ways in which churches in Mberengwa, Zimbabwe can tap into the local Karanga cultural resources to enhance church unity.

Karanga social construct of *ukama*

Mberengwa is predominantly a Karanga district with a few Ndebele people who came from Filabusi and Fort Rixon in Matabeleland during the colonial era. The Karanga people are part of the larger Shona dialect in Zimbabwe. It should be observed that the Shona dialect includes the Karanga, Korekore, Manyika, Ndau and Zezuru. Although they have some similar cultural practices, they also have notable differences. The Karanga people are mostly found in the Mberengwa, Zvishavane and Shurugwi districts of the Midlands province as well as in some parts of Masvingo province (Shoko 2007). Some people generally use Shona and Karanga interchangeably, hence the Karanga are generally referred to as the Shona people. Although some practices may be particular to Karanga people, some of the aspects of Shona practices cut across the dialects. This article specifically focuses on the Karanga in the Mberengwa area for delimitation. I use the Karanga of Mberengwa with which I

am more familiar. *Ukama* is one of many cultural traits of the Karanga people. *Ukama* is closely connected to *ubuntu* or *unhu* in Karanga and the general African ethic of caring for one another and respecting human dignity. It emphasises human relatedness and connectedness. Murove (2009) posits that ubuntu [humanness] is the concrete form of *ukama* [relatedness]. Basically, ubuntu or unhu becomes another aspect of *ukama* demonstrating how people live together in their various relationships. Among the Karanga, 'ukama stresses that family is based on bondedness and the relationality of traditional African society' (Ndofirepi & Shanyanana 2016:431). So, relatedness and coexistence among the Karanga community is known as *ukama* (Gwaravanda 2016:viii). The notion is accentuated by the tradition of celebration, working and mourning together. The ethical practices of *ukama* unite people and build their relationship as a family and community. In Africa and particularly in Zimbabwe, the notion of family integrates all people beyond one's immediate kinsfolk (Ndofirepi & Shanyanana 2016:433). This refers to relational ties of community members. Every created human being is part of the human family. The concept of *ukama* emphasises community cooperation, hospitality and inclusivity.

Family

Family [*mhuri*] is the base for Karanga relationships [*ukama*]. Family members are referred to as *hama* or *vehukama* [kinsmen]. This notion is sometimes difficult to interpret in the western worldview or English terms because some of the terms used to explain *ukama* oversimplify it or inadequately cover the various aspects it embodies. Among the Karanga, the notion of *ukama* begins with the relationship among the immediate and extended family members and ends with all human beings including neighbours and passers-by or strangers meeting on the way. Gelfand alludes that the essence of 'ukama is a brotherhood [*sic*] in which members of the group share with one another and find peace through love of all in the extended family, or clan' (1981:ix). Family begins with a father, mother and their children then the web grows to include all members related to the family. These are grandparents, the aunties and the uncles and those from the in-laws (*vakarabwa*). When people relate through marriage, they create *ukama* and become *vehukama* or *hama,* meaning relatives. They all have specific roles to play during the rites of passage as family members to promote life and bring harmony and peaceful coexistence. Grooming children from these family members is everybody's responsibility. This is emphasised by the Karanga saying, *mwana ndewe munhu wose* meaning the child belongs to the family or community. All family members are expected to take care, guide, rebuke, discipline and counsel children. Children are always introduced and reminded of the people in their family neighbourhood and their relationships (Ndofirepi & Shanyanana 2016:434). This would preserve *ukama* from one generation to the other. The family functions like a body where each part works in harmony with others. If one part happens to be dysfunctional, the whole system is affected, hence harmony should be preserved at all costs.

3.ZCC, ZCBC and the EFZ produced pastoral letters denouncing violence and calling for peace in Zimbabwe.

Family may as well refer to all people sharing the same totem [*mutupo*] living in the same vicinity. Totems are identities that families use, based on a non-human object or animal. These are associated with some animals and birds (Shoko 2007:18). Some are called *Shoko* [Monkey], *Zhou* [Elephant] and *Hove* [Fish]. According to Mhaka (2010:29), 'All people sharing a common totemic title belong to one family or group'. For Gelfand (1981:9) totems can refer to the close brotherhood of the nuclear family or the wider extended unity beyond nuclear parameters. In some cases, when the Hove area, which predominantly consists of the Hove people, has other totems present, they try to find ways of relating together either as brothers or in-laws (*vakarabwa or vakwasha*) depending on their totems. Love and unity are enforced and unquestionably strengthened as people support each other in times of sorrow and happiness.

Communalism

In a broader sense, the Karanga notion of *ukama* expands throughout the community. In this case, the community refers to those in the local area of *sabhuku*[4] and the chief [*sadunhu*] as well as *hama* living afar. These form the community that impacts or shapes one's life. Like other African people, the Karanga also chooses community rather than focuses on the individual (Baloyi 2014:3). 'This African mode of inclusion differs from western practices by prioritising the community of others over the individual' (Ndofirepi & Shanyanana 2016:431). The life of the individual revolves around the community that gives him or her values. This is echoed by Mbiti's popular expression 'I am because we are, and since we are therefore, I am' (Mbiti 1969:104). Baloyi (2014) also posits that:

> [*T*]he idiom, 'I am because we are' applies not only when people are enjoying the beauty and benefits of life but remains relevant even when people are faced with difficulties in their lives, death included. (p. 3)

The Karanga would say, 'Munhu wose ihama yako', meaning every person is your relative [*hama*] or *hama ruzhohwa* [relatives are a fence] for protection and safety. This concept of *ukama* and its basis of communalism reflects on the biblical truth of creation that humanity belongs together because we are all created in the image of God, hence we have the same origin (Gn 1:27). Murove (1999:1) argues that 'living by the ethic of *ukama* means seeing oneself in connection with other people'. Everyone should be accepted, embraced and respected unconditionally.

The idea of being a community comes from the interconnections, dependency and sharing life together. They make *ukama* important as a community through the realisation of community ownership and responsibilities. The Karanga share communal farming, grazing land, water, wild animals and vegetation within their area. They all take responsibility for raising children of the community as well as protecting their animals and natural resources. They are also responsible for protecting *ukama* because it fulfils their humanness by

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4.*Sabhuku* refers to a village head of a local community under a chief.

being in relation to another (Mhaka 2010). Being human is by way of serving others around you and preserving community harmony. The individual works to promote the source of livelihood that is the community, and the individual can only flourish in *ukama* within the community (Murove 2004). The individual remains a small fraction of a bigger community that has brought him or her up.

Cooperation

Another key feature of the *ukama* ethic is communal cooperation. Among the Karanga, *ukama* includes values of love, recognition, mutual respect and cooperation (Chimuka 2001:36). 'The quality of communal life depends on the quality of investment of lives people share with others' (Mhaka 2010:26). There is cooperation in knowing and working together, hence all people are expected to journey together to acquire knowledge and skills through mutual love and sharing (Ndofirepi & Shanyanana 2016). Therefore, in the family, village and neighbourhood, the Karanga have a culture of teamwork. When one has too much work at home and in the fields, they call others for help and support. The coming together for helping is *humwe* and when it is weeding the fields it is called *nhimbe*. Those invited include extended family members and members of the local community. There is a sign of love and unity whereby one is helped to develop and survive. The community give their life to help another. They work in accompaniment and assist each other in the process. This is seen when women go out together to fetch water or firewood, each one for her own family. Boys and men may also go out looking after cattle and construction wood. Generally, the culture of working together is nurtured and promoted. Ndofirepi and Shanyanana (2016) highlight that:

> All members of a community, old and young, are encouraged to relate well with others in order to retain community membership. From an early age, children are encouraged to work for the community good first, knowing their own individual well-being will be ensured through such action. (p. 433)

Communal work is performed during *humwe*, marriage ceremonies, caring for the sick and funerals. They experience suffering and joy together (Chimuka 2001:34). During funerals there is no invitation, but the word is passed from one family to the other and people will gather. An individual or family crisis becomes a community crisis. They bring their food to be cooked and shared. Sometimes the food is put on one plate for different age groups, and they share. *Ukama* means unity, sharing and working together as a community. They also bring their own tools to be used during funerals, marriage ceremonies and *humwe*. People build relationships as they work and talk to one another. When they come together, sometimes they eat together from one plate according to age groups. In the culture, they have a saying '*Ukama igasva hunozadziswa nokudya*' meaning people's relationship will never be complete without sharing food. This encourages love, cooperation and hospitality among the people. Whenever people meet or work together, they should eat together. This strengthens their love and communal living.

Hospitality and fellow feeling

The notion of *ukama* is well expressed in hospitality. 'Hospitality has always been a shining virtue of the natives; it is readily extended to all members of a family or clan' (Posselt 1978:111). Each family and community member and even strangers have a warm welcome any time of the day. Their needs are readily attended to whenever they knock. According to Gelfand (1981), joy and satisfaction are in helping and serving others in the community. '*Ukama* is not a theoretical concept but an existential reality which should be enacted through the sharing of food and possessions' (Murove 1999:12). The Karanga also serve family members and neighbours by providing both food and means of production. To alleviate poverty, they provide both human and animal labour. They provide the poor neighbours with animals for ploughing, milking and manure. They participate in *humwe* in order to plough and harvest for those who need their assistance.

However, hospitality is not restricted to the local community but extended to strangers and travellers. Strangers have their needs for shelter and food met whenever they knock on the doors of the community (Posselt 1978). As alluded to earlier:

> [S]haring is valuable to Shona communities. One common proverb[5] under this theme is '*Muenzi haapedzi dura*' which can roughly be translated as 'no one can starve by showing hospitality to a stranger'. (Mhaka 2010:26)

In the process, they build *ukama* with the stranger. When they welcome strangers, the Karanga people greet him or her and ask about their origins and totem [*mutupo*]. This is done to find ways of connecting and build family relationships as a way of accommodating the stranger. Depending on the their totem, the stranger is addressed as an uncle or aunt, brother or sister, father or mother and child as a way of accommodating them. The Karanga relate to the person in such a way they would not only call by their name but by their *ukama* title. This is experienced when people meet at church, school, and workplaces, as well as when they meet in cities and even in the diaspora. More often this solidifies their love for one another and paves the way for supporting each other and promoting hospitality. The notion of *ukama* among the Karanga people connects people. Because of the interconnection and interrelatedness, they always share their joy and sorrow as a family and community.

Inclusivity

However, it should be noticed that community relations are more inclusive when drawing from the concept of *ukama*. 'Relatedness and interrelatedness with everything in existence is what makes *ukama* unique' (Murove 1999:4). This kind of inclusivity extends beyond humanity to include all of creation. Life is a shared reality with everybody including

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5. The Karanga use proverbs to teach ethics of life. Every time they want to teach or emphasise something they use sayings and proverbs. Some of the proverbs alluded to in this work are: *Gumwe rimwe haritsvanyi inda* – to teach about unity; *Munhu wose ihama yako* – to emphasise the notion of *ukama*; *Ukama igasva hunozadziswa nokudya* – to emphasise sharing of food, and *Muenzi haapedzi dura* – teaching hospitality.

people of different backgrounds and one's surroundings. Therefore, *ukama* establishes ties between humanity and all of creation. Any good or harm to humanity or the environment equally affects both sides, hence the need for harmonious living. '*Ukama* stands for the conviction that reality is relational' (Gwaravanda 2016:162). This relationship of interconnection and togetherness expresses the idea of interdependence of creation (Bujo 1998:22–23). According to Grange (2012:333), this human relationship with the natural world is buttressed using totems among the Karanga people. The Karanga people respect and preserve the animals and birds that mark their totems. They would not hunt or eat such animals for it is a taboo. Some sickness and misfortune are said to relate to eating one's totem. Such understanding of human connectedness can cultivate the spirit of ecumenism as the church fulfils its mission of humanity and creation. It is important to understand the significance of the mutual relationship between humanity and nature. Being human depends on relationships and connections that need to be preserved to enable life to flourish. Ecumenism does not only focus on human flourishing but also on preserving nature as a way of celebrating God's creation.

Discussion: Ecumenical reflections in the light of *ukama*

Nearly 90% of the Mberengwa population is Karanga with about 10% being Ndebele. This also reflects in the membership of the churches in Mberengwa. In most cases, they seek to build family ties and love relationships. This is expressed in the form of greeting, working and eating together and sharing life's joys and pains as a family and village community. Hove (2024) argues that:

> When denominations come together to support the bereaved family, it creates space for the growth of ecumenism that bridges denominational boundaries and barriers. This strengthens the spirit of unity and collaboration in the community. (p. 9)

The above-mentioned activities and relationships transcend denominational barriers and doctrinal differences. In a way, we find a form of ecumenical engagement that is unique and linked to Christian love and fellowship. One may argue that the churches can learn and utilise this approach to unity as it seeks to engage with other churches in Zimbabwe. Tied to the concept of *ukama*, the unity of the church is summarised by Wolfgang (ed. 1998) when he says:

> The unity of the church to which we are called is a fellowship given and expressed in the common confession of the apostolic faith: a common sacramental life entered by one baptism and celebrated together in one Eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministers are mutually recognized and reconciled; and a common mission witnessing to the gospel of God's grace to all people and serving the whole creation. (p. 69)

Church as family and community

The Karanga notion of *ukama* informs local churches' ecumenical engagement. It may inform the ways of relating

with people of other denominational backgrounds through the common background of Christianity or Christ (Eph 4:4–6). Besides being united in God, Christ and baptism, humanity is united by being created in the image of God (Gn 1:27). In Karanga social relationships, people are related because of being human beings despite their different backgrounds and/or family origins. No one is regarded as an outsider or stranger. Everyone is created by God [*Mwari*[6]] and is an equal member of the community. When they come to church, they also come as families and community (Hove 2020). Christ regards his followers as his brothers and sisters, God's children and members of the family and household of God. In fact, in some churches, members call each other sisters and brothers in Christ. The denominations seem to disturb communal living and the social fibre instead of learning from it and enhancing it. Instead of defining a church as a 'tribe' like John Mbiti, I would like to refer to it as a community of social relationships. Such a church will never be divided by denominations as it remains connected through appreciation of culture and social relationships. Similarly, the various denominations should be looked at as families with different totems and family cultural backgrounds but continue to be united because they all belong to one God. After all, Christians belong together because of their faith and baptism in one God and saviour Jesus Christ. We belong together as brothers and sisters in Christ [*hama muna Kristu*].

Doctrinal, liturgical and theological diversity 'gives us an ever-richer expression to the authentic catholicity and apostolicity of the church' (Frederick 2015:215). Diversity is a gift that needs to be celebrated in the family, community and church. Each church's strengths and differences should rather be treated as a means of complementing others as co-workers in the vineyard (Chitando & Biri 2016). The differences also put Christianity to test. Christians are commanded to love one another and love one's neighbour as oneself (Lk 10:27, Jn 13:34). The diversity in understanding truth and salvation calls for love and tolerance among brothers and sisters in the Lord. *Ukama* will always bind people together as family and community. There are no strangers. Christians need to embrace one another bearing in mind that they are related in God and Christ and in life. Churches can only appreciate ecumenical engagement if they become honest that they cannot do mission without others – like an individual who finds it difficult to survive without the community. *Ukama* brings about a web of networks that help people and families to survive. Churches can benefit from each other in human, material and spiritual resources through ecumenical engagement. Through ecumenical network, they can fulfil the mission of God of giving light and life (Mt 5:16; Jn 10:10).

Hospitality

Local churches are usually divided on the issues of healing[7]and Eucharist. These impede hospitality among

people from different denominations. When it comes to healing, mainline churches such as the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Methodist churches use prayer and modern medicine. Their ministry entails the building of hospitals for medical treatment. African indigenous churches such as Johane Marange emphasise miracles, prayer, and faith healing. In these churches and Pentecostals, '[s]piritual healing is part of the core doctrines' (Mwaura 2000:82). They specialise in dealing with spiritual forces such as witchcraft and various individual or family curses causing misfortune including disease, poverty, and unemployment (Shoko 2007). Their membership is discouraged from going to hospitals no matter how serious the medical condition is. Their specialisation in dealing with various health and social challenges has drawn members from the mainline churches. They are blamed for 'sheep stealing' as members join these churches for miracles and spiritual healing (Chitando & Biri 2016). This has become a source of conflict and division among local churches.

The issues that divide these churches should be the ones that unite them. As both groups believe in prayer, they need to complement each other on medical and spiritual healing. They are fighting a common enemy, namely sickness and suffering. They both desire to save life using different approaches. They need to find common ground as brothers and sisters on a mission. Churches need to find ways of accommodating each other as *hama*. That would enhance ecumenism in Zimbabwe.

Another conflict is created by different understanding and accommodation of one another on Eucharist. On the one hand, AICs and Pentecostals take a casual approach towards Eucharist, which they share or receive once a year. On the other hand, mainline churches such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe (ELCZ), the Methodist and Presbyterian churches celebrate Eucharist more often during their services. They can easily accommodate other mainline churches if they leave out AICs and Pentecostals. There is a true lack of love and hospitality as a result of different doctrinal backgrounds. This gap can only be bridged through understanding the Karanga concept of *Ukama* that accommodates everybody despite their differences. Similarly, Christianity is centred on hospitality and accommodating one another. In Christ, God welcomes and receives everybody despite their sinful backgrounds (Rm 5:8). 'Every authentic faith experience demands concrete witnesses, often described as liturgical life, in response to the divine invitation' (Nkwocha 2016). The church is a place of hospitality following the great hospitality God has demonstrated. Denominational differences should not act as barriers to hospitality and unity.

In Karanga '*Ukama igasva hunozadziswa nokudya*' means our relationships can only be fulfilled by sharing food. Church hospitality can be best expressed through Eucharist. Sharing at the table of Eucharist is a true reflection of *ukama.* Eucharist

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6.Mwari is the Karanga name of God. It means the creator and author of all life.

7.Healing is different from treatment but here it is generalised and used interchangeably. However, in faith healing they both address cause and symptoms. The cause is usually connected to spiritual forces, either from curses or witchcraft and sorcery.

is a gift of God that calls Christians to share the love of Christ with one another. 'In Jesus's Eucharistic hospitality,' God manifested his will that expresses love towards a neighbour who may be qualified as a stranger according to human standards (Nkwocha 2016). Christian worship and Eucharist have to do with hospitality because there is an invitation to share in grace:

> A service begins with a call to corporate worship, an invitation to insiders and outsiders alike to join in the narrative of God's redeeming love and to be formed over time with repeated engagement toward Christlikeness. (Snyder 2015:48)

Worship reminds Christians of unity, and hence ecumenical engagement as it is both apostolic and catholic. Catholic faith binds churches together for life and mission (Frederick 2015:210). 'The entire Eucharistic celebration provides a reminder of our call to unity in Christ and a means of grace to strengthen us in the praxis of unity' (Frederick 2015:210). Through Eucharist we are strengthened and bound together in unity with God and one another.

True hospitality is when we invite and share the Eucharist as children of God. This kind of hospitality brings churches together and strengthens community unity. Christianity should be lived as 'Eucharistic persons or community, where oneness, equality, and reciprocity prevail for the sake of Christ' (Nkwocha 2016). The church living in hospitality and reciprocity fulfils the love of God in Christ. The Master of Hospitality has called and accommodated all for salvation, hence the church should be encouraged to be hospitable. This can be done through finding common ground on matters of healing and accommodating each other in worship and Eucharist.

Cooperation and fellow feeling

Generally, loving people work and live together. The Karanga expression of *Ukama* is through journeying with one another in good and bad times. This is also true for the early church that lived together. 'All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had' (Ac 4:32). That means they shared their material and spiritual resources for the common good. Similarly, the Karanga express communal solidarity in harvesting, ploughing and threshing, sharing resources with the needy (Chimhanda 2014:319). They do not allow any member to struggle with poverty; where need be, they help through resources and food.

In Karanga communities, cooperation is also experienced when members come together for healing in AICs and Pentecostal and Charismatic churches or hospitals. In Karanga healing is not secret but a communal activity. When one goes for healing or treatment at church or hospital, he or she goes with some of the members of the family. It is imperative that they should know the cause and nature of the diseases. This reminds us of the incident when Jesus healed the sick, the blind and demon-possessed. Most of his healing took place in public and in community. 'That evening

after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon possessed…' (Mk 1:32). In another incident, people brought the paralytic through the roof for healing (Lk 5:17–26). Such cooperation should be a means to unite churches. They cannot only cooperate in suffering but work together in all situations.

Cooperation is needed given the various challenges the people as a community and nation face. Experiences of domestic and social injustices need to be addressed by churches together with government and civil society[8] organisations. Churches united for a common cause, such as concern for the poor and the oppressed truly engage in *missio Dei*. 'Jesus' mission was liberation of the poor and the oppressed and compassion to the needy, stranger, sick and the suffering' (Lk 4:16–18; Mt 25:31–46) (Chimhanda 2014:318). Salvation in Christ is accompanied by freedom and justice. Christ came for abundant life; hence the church should work towards the fulfilment of the mission of God in Christ (Jn 10:10). The desire for justice and freedom of oppression should involve the church in its entirety. This can be done to different people from different churches but can only be done together communally and ecumenically.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is a process of finding ways to bring together rival people or groups. It involves seeking truth, justice and forgiveness (Munemo & Nciizah 2014:64). Zimbabwean people are bitterly divided by politics and religious movements. Since 2000, most people and families have been divided as a result of political violence and political partisan polarisation (Chimhanda 2014). These issues that happen in the church and outside the church damage people's relationships with the church and community (Frederick 2015:218). In the context of political violence, churches tend to be divided according to denominations. Mainline churches strive to be critical to the government and political parties that cause violence and injustices. Some are well known to be opposition parties such as the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and the later Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) sympathisers working for a change of government. Despite the rare critical comments pronounced from Pentecostal movements, they are generally blamed for supporting the status quo (Chitando & Biri 2016:76). They are usually invited by members of the ruling ZANU PF party to family, private or public functions. Their common friendly engagement with political leaders leads them to be treated with suspicion by other churches. Similarly, the AICs are well known to be aligned with the ruling party.

There is antagonism and rifts among the Pentecostals and mainline churches. This is exacerbated by religious labels and calling each other with derogatory names and hence affecting local ecumenism. Pentecostals are blamed for preaching material prosperity in the 'here and now' and practising stage-managed miracles (Chitando & Biri 2016). On the other hand,

8.Civil society refers to human rights movements and other non-governmental organisations dealing with humanitarian needs and social justice.

'[p]entecostal prophets criticise missionary Christianity for having placated and soothed a restive African population by promising heaven in the "sweet by and by"' (Chitando & Biri 2016:75). Mainline churches are also blamed for denying miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit while emphasising intellectual western spirituality. Like the African Traditional Religion (ATR) *n'anga*, the AICs prophets are divine healers who diagnose the cause of disease and heal the sick and exorcise evil spirits (Shoko 2007:54). It is common that popular prophets practice both prophetic and traditional healing. Some of them practice traditional healing when they leave their churches (Chitando & Biri 2016). Their specialisation in exorcism and deliverance has led members from other churches including mainline churches to attend their churches while others became members (Chitando & Biri 2016:77). These differences continue to separate the churches instead of bringing them together.

Antagonism among churches can be dealt with using both theological and local social resources. *Ukama* brings people together realising that they will always need each other. There is never an issue that cannot be resolved. The scandal of division is not acceptable and should not be regarded as normal. It has to be corrected through reconciliation. Christ has shown the way for the church. He came to reconcile people to God and one another (Col 1:20). 'Thus, in part, God's hospitality toward us requires from us a response of hospitality and reconciliation toward others' (Snyder 2015:48). As churches follow Christ of reconciliation, they should find ways of reconciling despite their many differences.

Reconciliation is made possible by understanding love and respect for one another. Love and respect are born out of a common faith in one God and saviour Jesus Christ and a common mission of serving the community (Frederick 2015:210). Through Eucharist, Christians should understand 'the divine act of forgiveness and reconciliation' (Snyder 2015:48). People in Zimbabwe look to the church for forgiveness, peace and reconciliation (Munemo & Nciizah 2014). The church is regarded as a moral compass to take the leading role in reconciliation. If churches cannot come together and reconcile their differences, they will not play their expected role in society. The apostle Paul insists that, reconciliation is the core business of church ministry (2 Cor. 5:18). The church ministry is to reconcile humanity with God and one another. Reconciliation heals broken human relationships. Being inspired by *ukama*, churches may seek to listen to each other and strive to be reconciled and work together in serving the community.

Inclusivity

The causes of exclusion include differences in days of worship. Churches such as Madzibaba, and the Johane Masowe worship on Thursday and Friday, respectively; others such as the Seventh-day Adventist Church and Johane Marange (Mapositori) worship on Saturday; but the majority of mainline churches and Pentecostals worship on Sunday. Further exclusion is the understanding of ministry. Mainline churches such as the Lutheran and Methodist churches allow the ordination of female pastors and give women leadership positions in the church. This is not acceptable among the AICs who think it is unbiblical.

Furthermore, there is the exclusion of unbelievers and people of other religions. Other religions in Zimbabwe include the ATR, Jewish Voice, Bahai Faith and Islam. This kind of exclusion does not promote love and unity of the church and community. Churches need each other and other religions to promote unity community. Hove (2024:13) argues that broader collegiality and church unity promote harmony among members of the community. Setiloane (1989) succinctly posits that:

Every person is related to one another. These relationships, by blood, by marriage or by mere association, are emotionally seated and cherished dearly. This becomes evident where a need arises, like some tragedy (a death) or occasion for rejoicing. (p. 9)

Ukama is inclusive of every community member to build a community life that sustains all members of the community in times of trouble. Based on *Ukama*, the church should create space for inclusion. They should begin by including one another and expand the net to people who belong to other religions. 'Believers must discern what is good and must draw on the work and knowledge of believers and unbelievers alike' (Snyder 2015:45). The starting point is acknowledging that every member of the community and every church and religion has something to offer to the community. In as much as people are created by God, every religion is a gift from God to approach the divine.

From the Karanga, there is no foreigner because every person is a relative [*hama*]. Similarly, nobody is a foreigner before God who desires all people to bow before him. Matikiti (2017) argues:

The key verse in the Inclusive Model is that the will of God is for the salvation of humanity (1 Timothy 2:4). Jesus's desire is that all people will come to the knowledge of the truth; knowledge of Christ precedes the reception of saving grace in faith. Inclusivism is based on two suppositions: the first is that salvation is through Christ alone, the second is that God wills the whole world to be saved. Consequently, God saves people through Christ alone; however, he makes this possible through ways that extend to all humanity. Inclusivism is the belief that God is present in non-Christian religions and cultures to save the adherents through Christ. (p. 142)

Inclusion may not be in places of worship but generally in local communities and churches should acknowledge each other and those other religions. Pastors have a role to bring people together and work together during weddings and funerals despite their denominational differences (Frederick 2015). Inclusion requires the political will of church leadership. Church members are taught who is one with them and who does not belong to them. They do not exclude each other in their communities except when led by their leaders. Inclusion is helpful in uniting and building health churches and communities..

Conclusion

Christianity is always found within the people's culture. Purves (2004:95) agrees that '[a]lthough it is divinely established, it operates within the culture of the local people'. Each culture has something to build on to reinforce the Christian mission. This article concludes that among the Karanga in Mberengwa, ecumenism can be informed and reinforced by the concept of *ukama* through aspects such as family or community, cooperation, reconciliation and inclusivity, which are compatible with biblical teachings and Christian ethics. These can help churches to have broader unity and collegiality and working together in the local communities they serve where people are already related and connected through *ukama.* The tenets of *ukama* are untapped reservoirs for ecumenical engagement. If they are maximised, Christians would easily be united because it is found in their culture, local experiences and general Christian principles.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

Author's contribution

R.H. is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of South Africa College of Human Sciences_CREC (No. Rec-240816-052).

Funding information

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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