

SENIOR EDUCATION OFFICERS CONFERENCE - WEWAK
AUGUST 1 – 5, 2011

ACHIEVING QUALITY EDUCATION THROUGH CHURCH PARTNERSHIP.

By Joe Ponduk, National Education Secretary, SDA School System, PNG.

Every education system has an underlying goal. Education must have direction, provided by the philosophy which gives it significance or it must be for something. Church education systems are no different. Until we come to know and experience the goal for ourselves, then the impact on what we do will always fall short of the high ideals set before us..

Churches over the years have worked hard even in harsh conditions to bring services to the people and one tool that had proven successful in reaching the people was through Christian education. So while the partnership policy framework may be the new beginning, Churches over the years have been partners with the government. The government has the funding source and the Christian Churches can provide in-kind resource for the partnership and in doing so will improve and strengthen the relationship.

“ Our vision is integral human development achieved through an affordable education system that appreciates Christian and traditional values, and that prepares literate, skilled and healthy citizens by concentrating on the growth and development of each individual’s personal viability and character formation, while ensuring all can contribute to the peace and prosperity of the nation.” A National Plan for Education 2005 – 2015.

To examine the Christian values in education, to see that they are intended to produce a certain type of Christian man, and through that man, a certain type of Christian service, to see that educational systems derive their values from their philosophy, and therefore that the values of Christian education , if they are to have validity and if they are to be truly Christian, must take their shape, their direction, and their force from the Christian religion, working by the Holy Spirit through human lives.

Church partnership with the government is a great move to help strengthen the academic programs in Church run schools through the different support that the government will provide. Developing young people with strong morals, values and positive attitudes which will result in producing strong leaders for all levels of the country, from rural to the urban sector and what church schools believe in. Church schools incorporate their religious beliefs into their curriculum and academic programs but they still use and follow the educational curriculum that is set by the education department of PNG. Tritter J (1992) in his study done in the United States of America has highlighted that religious schools tend to produce students with stronger and more uniform attitudes towards religion and morality than government schools. Religion still provides an important part in ensuring the transmission of moral values in students from each stage of their lives which will enable them to become strong and successful leaders in the society.

The partnership between the Church schools and the government means more support in different means from the government to Church schools. The partnership means, church schools will receive financial support, will be able to express their needs, experiences, views and plans directly with the appropriate educational leaders as they jointly discuss and plan better ways of improving the educational level of schools in PNG. Tritter J (1984) saw schools as a socialising tool of society, with an effort on the norm, values, and behaviour of students, preparing them for adult culture. Social values is demonstrated to everyone on his work; education for service to humanity; the whole person is to be dedicated to God's service and the future course of society will be determined by the youth of today and education given to the youth is to mould the whole social fabric. Church schools operate on those categories, they believe in educating and helping every individual student. They take a keen interest in the individuals, and their parents and guardians do their best to mentor positive attitudes in them. Church schools operate in rural and remote areas in PNG where often there is no presence of government schools. So the support from the government will help to fulfil the Universal Basic Education goals, which every child has the right to education and everyone must be educated. The government can not establish schools in every rural areas and that is where Church schools come in.

Basset (2008) purported that schools at all levels are more than a training ground for developing skills or assimilating the fundamentals of a prescribed secular curriculum. It is also a haven, a protected place where society's most important personal and common value can be seen and emulated. Personal values include the privilege and duty of maximum development, a life-long education, development of the whole person, balance of the mental, physical, and spiritual, physical well-being through observance of the laws of health, intelligent and physical work habits, character building etc, It is clear that parents trust the school of their choice and that is where they enrol their children. In most rural sites in PNG, there would only be one or two schools and all parents would want their children to prosper, therefore, the partnership will enable the government to work closely with church schools to provide education that will be quality for students academically and instil Christian values that will mould them become good citizens and leaders.

Quality education can be achieved by any schools that believe in providing the best educational program and Church schools are very capable of providing quality education. With Vision 2050 to guide us, as we jointly discuss ways of eliminating problems and put in place plans that can be easily implemented by schools to ensure quality education is provided to our children.

And here is what little emphasis is placed or not seriously taken is spiritual values. The highest level of education is that which will give such knowledge and discipline and will lead to the best development of character; scripture the best source which set the perfect standard of truth and to obtain an education worthy of the name and education for eternity, the goal to be reached, that is the school above. Therefore, the entire program is woven into an integrated whole, unified by its religious polarity.

To achieve full integral human development, the holistic approach may be considered in order to achieve quality education. Church schools emphasises on discipline and holistic development, they are interested in building students academically, religiously, physically and socially. The four dimensions of a human being must be considered in order to achieve a well balanced education. You have an unbalanced person when too much emphasis is based on the mental and the physical and neglect spiritual and the social aspects. It is time to share their experiences and ideas to the government and other education partners. Schools that have excelled academically should also share their ideas and others can learn from them and apply some of their techniques into their own academic program to make a difference. The partnership should not be looked at as an opportunity to receive guidance and financial support only from the government, but rather, it should be a joint venture for church educational leaders, senior education administrators and the government to seriously look at Vision 2050 and come up with realistic plans that will ensure that both church and government schools are aiming to produce quality education.

Our constitution highlights that everyone in our community has the right to freedom, education and every good thing. This partnership should enable us to ensure that our church institutions work closely with the government to plan smart ways of ensuring that all children, despite gender in all communities are encouraged to attend school. We have a very good curriculum that suit our learning style, all we need to do is increase our human resource, make available more academic resources to all schools, provide more in-service training to the teachers, involved parents in educational decision making level at rural settings, conduct maintenance to classrooms, improve libraries etc. These are some things that can be sorted out in a small way as we work together as partners with an aim to provide quality education for our children. Quality education is already being achieved but as leaders we just have to work together and share ideas and experiences together to build a strong education system that will develop our human resource for PNG.

In order to strengthen quality education through Church partnership, the following could be considered. Education agency secretaries could be considered on doing inspection of teachers and provide reports for the Provincial Education Adviser or the Standard Officer and could participate in the ratings conference. The move could address the shortage of standard officers throughout the country. This will enable the standard officers and Church education secretaries to work together as partners and sharing ideas and strengthening the relationship. Also with the partnership, the Education Act 1983, may have to be reviewed to accommodate the churches because current policies are designed for the government education agency even though there may be provision given already to accommodate other agencies. This may be able to give the Christian Churches more autonomy to carry out their functions effectively. For instance, appointment of teachers by the appointing officer to church agency schools with little or no consultation. Often this creates tension so consultation is required to improve relationship. The Joint Commitment Principles is an excellent initiative by the department of education to include church representatives in the joint committees so churches make a meaningful contribution. As soon as these joint committees are ratified by the appropriate body, the committees should function to strengthen the partnership.

So what is it that the Church schools do that the government schools do not? The government in its Vision 2050 is serious about the role of Churches as partners in national development and that this should be welcomed and encouraged. *Under the Universal Basic Education program initiated by the government, three core issues are dealt with. They are access to education by the children of PNG, to keep as many of these students in schools and to ensure that they get quality education.* Post – Courier, Tuesday, July 19, 2011.

Is it possible for us to achieve those core issues? This is a mammoth task and the government while it may have the resources can not do it on its own as it has admitted, so is calling on the stakeholders including the Christian Churches in delivering the services. Education in PNG is going through an exciting period since it went into partnership with the Christian Churches. The challenge is having the manpower and the resources to sustain the systems.

The Churches/State partnership agreement has opened new avenues which can be explored to take advantage of the opportunities that are there. This will mean that those of us who are keen on the partnership need to look carefully at what has happened to education in the past and what can be done so that access, retention and quality education can be provided for the students. With the partnership arrangements with the Christian Churches, this will mean changing the way we have been thinking and the way we have been doing things and doing things differently in order to see change. If we continue to think and do things the same as we have been in the past, things will continue that way. The timing is right for the Christian Churches and the government to change the mind set and think out side of the box in order to move PNG education to the next level, that is, an education that is worthy of the name.

References

Basset: Brigham Young University Law Review. Changing Perception of Private Religious Schools: Public Money and Public Trust in the Education of Children. Provo:2008. Vol 2008. Iss. 2; pg. 243, 32 pgs

Arthur, J (1994) Religious Education and State Education affect students lives. British Journal of Educational Studies, Vol. 8, 2 June

Tritter, J (1992) A Educational Change in Moral Values: some effects of religious and state schools in students. Oxford Review of Education, Vol 18. No.1, 1992.

Aspects of Christian Education, An Outline from Spirit of Prophecy Statements, PNGUM Education Department, 2010.