

INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPHINE SHAMWANA-LUNGU, EDUCATION SECRETARY, ARCHDIOCESE OF LUSAKA, ZAMBIA

*Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon
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EXCERPTS:

- “Catholic education in Zambia needs to move away from relying on past glory and achievements and re-assert its relevance by ensuring that there is investment in research on the type of education that the Church needs to provide for the future skills and development of the society.”
- “Governance is critical in assuring quality education; some institutions need to invest in the formation of lay leaders who are the bearers of the particular charisms in the schools, in light of the declining numbers of the religious members on the staff.”

You manage the Catholic School network of the Archdiocese of Lusaka in Zambia. Could you tell us what your work entails?

The office of the Education Secretary was established in 2019 for the Archdiocese of Lusaka and my first task was to set up this office. Prior to this all matters concerning education for the Archdiocese were dealt with by the National Catholic Education Secretariat of the Zambia Conference for the Catholic Bishops (ZCCB) that is located within the boundaries of the Archdiocese.

Being the Education Secretary, my work includes:

- Being responsible for the day to day administration of the education office for the Archdiocese;
- Coordinating the running of the Catholic educational institutions in the Archdiocese in order to maintain effective management and the delivery of quality education by participating in their policy making bodies such as school boards;
- Being the education communication link between the government ministries responsible for education and the Archdiocese; and through that represent the interests of the Archdiocese, Proprietors and Managing Agencies;

Box 1: Interview Series

What is the mission of the Global Catholic Education website? The site informs and connects Catholic educators globally. It provides them with data, analysis, opportunities to learn, and other resources to help them fulfill their mission with a focus on the preferential option for the poor.

Why a series of interviews? Interviews are a great way to share experiences in an accessible and personal way. This series will feature interviews with practitioners as well as researchers working in Catholic education, whether in a classroom, at a university, or with other organizations aiming to strengthen Catholic schools and universities.

What is the focus of this interview? In this interview, Josephine Shamwana-Lungu, Education Secretary for the Archdiocese of Lusaka in Zambia, talks about the challenges and opportunities faced by Catholic schools in the country and her hopes for the Global Compact on Education.

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- Ensuring that the Catholic identity stands at the centre of educational institutions that are Catholic and is sustained. This is done through formation (for school boards, school management and staff), dialogue, and monitoring and evaluation of institutional operations;
- Serving as a link between the National Catholic Educational Office and the Archdiocese of Lusaka;
- Facilitating the production of school formation materials.

What do you believe are the current strengths of Catholic education in Zambia?

Firstly, the Catholic Church in Zambia has over a hundred years long graced history of providing excellent education in the country, especially for the poor. This long history gives her a strong voice as a key stakeholder in the country to influence the national education policies and standards of education offered.

The Catholic Church in Zambia runs different categories of educational institutions: (a) Grant-aided – partnership between state and Church/Managing Agencies (most staff are provided and paid by the state); (b) Private Schools – run independently by Congregations/Managing Agencies; (c) Community Schools – Usually run by parishes; and (d) Tertiary: Skills training centres/Teacher training colleges/Universities.

Through the provision of excellent education and character formation, the Catholic education institutions have grown in strength and created a firm foundation and reputation. This reputation has set these institutions on an 'education market' sought by many, both Catholic and Non-Catholic, locally and regionally making it a 'brand' recognized widely both on the education and professional markets. In addition, excellent academic results for most of the schools have set higher standards of performance for all educational institutions to challenge. The annual school performance analyses in national examinations depict the top league standing of most Catholic Schools in comparison to state schools.

Secondly, as one of the major stakeholders in the provision of education, the Catholic education network plays a critical role and responsibility to model for other institutions what the ideal holistic education should consist of. The ability of Catholic schools to show the results of effective school management, high quality teaching and learning, supervision, excellent academic results, inclusive education, high school retention, serene and clean environments, and high graduation rates and progression to universities has given it strength to participate in education reforms at various consultative forums.

Thirdly, the large network of schools across the ten dioceses gives a further advantage to offer excellent education in both urban and rural areas and influence a larger population and disseminate information.

Fourthly, the schools have the flexibility to engage, attract and retain highly qualified staff, and enrich their curriculum. This is attributed to the semi-autonomy that the institutions operate under. They are also able to design and control their enrolment procedure and have the latitude to set the school fees where applicable in order to run their institutions marginally affordably.

Finally, there is a good coordination across the dioceses anchored in the national education office and its active link with the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops who have a key voice in the national landscape of the social development sector.

In which areas could Catholic education in the country be improved and how?

Some institutions need to revisit their *raison d'être*; due to financial challenges being experienced in the country, some institutions have focused more on the economic sustainability and neglected the sole purpose of why the Catholic Church provides education. The institutions should also model what inclusive education can produce for society.

Others are today no different from other secular education providers who merely focus on academic standing on school rankings and little is now done on character formation. There is less attention paid to the sacramental experience of both the staff and pupils in the schools.

Another area that needs improvement is the use of monitoring and evaluation tools for institutions to assess their fidelity to their mission. Catholic education in Zambia needs to move away from relying on past glory and achievements and re-assert its relevance by ensuring that there is investment in research on the type of education that the Church needs to provide for the future skills and development of the society so that there is a greater impact on the type of skills required for the future.

Governance is critical in assuring quality education; some institutions need to invest in the formation of lay leaders who are the bearers of the particular charisms in the schools, in light of the declining numbers of the religious members on the staff. Furthermore, the schools need to use their networks across the country to share skills and documents to ensure that the less capable educational institutional standards are raised.



Photo: Celebrating graduates.

There is a need to increase school construction as the demand for Catholic education is very high. There is a desperate need to have more schools constructed for boys. The Archdiocese of Lusaka has 65 registered schools, three youth skills training centres and a nursing training college. Almost all primary schools are co-education; but there are fewer schools at secondary level. There are more single sex girls' schools at the secondary level and only two strictly boys' secondary schools. The Archdiocese has now embarked on constructing another boarding school for boys. The Archdiocese has a lot of land that has not been developed. It has not fully utilized the largest concentration of religious congregations within its boundaries that could support projects in education. But it is notable that not all congregations have a charism that draws them to minister in education.

For the larger part of its one hundred years of providing education, the Catholic Church in Zambia has confined itself to providing primary and secondary education. There is a need to develop more Catholic tertiary institutions. It is only in the last few decades that it has been challenged to provide more tertiary education. The Bishops' conference has one university; many dioceses have teacher training colleges, nursing schools and skills training centres. The excellent students who graduate from Catholic secondary schools do not have many choices of Catholic educational institutions at the tertiary level. This is a market that could be quickly filled with strong performers that graduate with excellent secondary school results. These tertiary institutions would also be a continuation of the basic formation received in primary and secondary schools.

There is also a greater need to create an endowment policy in each institution so that scholarships are provided for highly gifted learners whose parents may not be able to afford the cost of education at different levels. Finally, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, there is need to train and retrain staff on how to integrate e-learning as a

new methodology. Many of the staff skills in computer literacy and access to the e-learning facilities are below standard levels.

Have you observed recently interesting innovative initiatives in Catholic education in Zambia? If so, what are they and why are those initiatives innovative?

I have observed these areas:

- a) The schools hold exhibition days, with the theme being reflected on by the Church; in 2019, for instance, in one diocese, the pupils in schools presented science projects, dance, drama, and poems to show how they could live out 'Laudate Si' at a basic family and school level. This year, plans to show case 'Fratelli Tutti' were cancelled because of the pandemic and current restrictions for group gatherings.
- b) A second initiative is the collective effort by Catholic school teachers to reach out to Catholic schools that do not have staff well trained in e-learning and sharing teaching and learning notes.
- c) There is a growing desire among lay Catholics to open 'Catholic schools' but they have little support to train their staff and pupils so that the true identity of a Catholic institution is upheld.



Photo: in the classroom.

How do you understand the call from Pope Francis for a new global impact on education? How do you think you could contribute to the Pope's vision?

I feel inspired by the Holy Father's invitation to all involved in education to re-examine how education can have a global impact. Building on the encyclical 'Fratelli Tutti', his invitation is a call to re-read documents such as '1977; The Catholic School'; 'On the threshold of the third millennium' and many other documents available for institutions to put 'flesh to' and bring alive.

His invitation to promote values of cura personalis; peace, justice, goodness, acceptance, beauty and fraternity are the key values of what should be lived in a Catholic school. This is part of the reason why the Church emphasizes that Catholic schools are not institutions but communities. Once this element is made the core of our modus operandi, then these values become the core of the fabric of any school community. The Holy Father invites us to examine the quality of our graduates and their impact and role in transforming the world that has distorted its value system and lost its human face to the needs of one another. One pathway that remains a possibility for a hopeful world is through education.

I could contribute to this through using my skills to prepare formation materials for use in schools and by being part of a core team that could promote dialogue and create reflection communities at school levels. Using a familiar 'village concept' to build a 'village of education', there is plenty of material at the basic level that could make it easier to transfer and use at school level.

Another way would be to research and help teachers find ways regarding how these values could be used to enrich the school curriculum so that the graduates of our schools sharpen their critical minds and ask relevant questions that help them build a conscience that desires more for the common good in society.

What events, projects or activities could be suggested to strengthen a common identity for Catholic education at a regional and global level? What are your ideas?

I could make a few suggestions:

- a) Constitute Catholic Identity Mission teams in the school community: Currently this team is missing in most schools at different leadership levels. Schools need teams that ensure that there is a 'mission statement thread' that runs through its various policies and activities. The education market tends to be more attractive using the secular standards.
- b) School exchange visits on how the common Catholic identity is lived: At both regional and global levels, school communities can create a 'virtual community' and share a 'Catholic education week' together for a specific time together. This would increase the acknowledgement and appreciation of belonging to a 'global network'. During this exchange, pupils could share their art work, or dance to learn how the different cultures influence the understanding of Catholic education.
- c) Create a school orientation and training material resource data base: This would be a collection of materials that schools could deposit in common for use in training and formation.
- d) Develop an electronic newsletter: Create a regional communications team that could get articles from

schools. This could be produced twice a year. The exchange of information through an e-newsletter would help disseminate information on institutional activities in the region or around the world.



Photo: Josephine with two Sisters.

What are some of the priorities in terms of training and capacity building for school principals, teachers, alumni, parents or other groups to strengthen Catholic education in Zambia?

Again, I could make a few suggestions:

- a) Understanding Catholic ethos and how it can be experienced in schools: clarity is important for schools to function distinctly and be supported. This clarity would influence the types of policies and plans schools make.
- b) Training in school governance, monitoring and supervision: There is need to train a resource base that could facilitate work in this area so that standards of operation in schools are more effective. It would also ensure that there is succession in leadership development.
- c) Understanding the roles of Proprietors/Managing Agencies in light of fewer religious members of staff: In some institutions there is tension in supervisory roles over school management and the Proprietor due to lack of clear training and guidelines.

- d) The role of lay staff in passing on the religious charism in Catholic schools: Many lay teachers do not see themselves as spiritual leaders in the school and leave the task to the few (if any) religious members on the staff to be the bearers of the charism in the school. In light of the declining numbers of religious members on the staff, lay leaders need to be trained further.

Could you please share how you ended up in your current position, what was your personal journey?

In 2017, I was sponsored as the School Principal of a Jesuit Secondary school to go and do a Master's Degree in Catholic School Leadership at St. Mary's University (Twickenham, London, UK). Upon my return, we had a discussion with the Archbishop of Lusaka about my desire to share my experience and all I had studied with a larger body than return to offering it in one school. He too shared his passion for education and invited me to create the education office for the Archdiocese. I have been in education for over 27 years, serving in various capacities from being an English Language teacher, Head of department, Primary school Head teacher, Secondary school Head teacher, School Superintendent to School Principal of a Jesuit School (which was the last school I served in before I left for further studies).

I have also served and continue to serve on various education advisory bodies in the country. I was part of the team that worked with the Bishop's conference to research, plan, and eventually bring to birth the Catholic University and served on its Council. I also serve on the country's Examination Council regulating all matters pertaining to examinations for secondary education in Zambia. The national Catholic education office has for many years made me part of a consultation team when the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops wants opinions or statements on education researched, drafted and presented for their consideration.

Finally, could you share a personal anecdote about yourself, what you are passionate about?

I am a gifted and passionate teacher and training facilitator. My greatest passion is to find ways to make an impact on education. I use my creativity to design formation materials for school leadership teams. As a Catholic, formed spiritually through the Ignatian spirituality, my desire is to be a sign of hope for lay people to be part of the designers/architects of what the future of Catholic education will look like.



Photos: Sports in the schools.

