



Centre for Research in Religious Life & Apostolate (CERRA-Africa)

Hosted at LRC The Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA)

Bogani East Rd, off Magadi Rd, Lang'ata, NAIROBI- KENYA

Telephone: (Office Mobile) +254 714 512984, info@cerra-africa.org |

www.cerra-africa.org

AOSK/CUEA/TUC Collaborative, Funded by Conrad Hilton Foundation

Theme:

Consecrated Women Religious in Africa: Creating a Global Impact on Sustainable Development

Dates: 10th – 12th June 2025

NAIROBI

Organizers:

**CERRA-Africa Data Center, Kenya,
kenya**



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Concept Note

About CERRA-Africa Data Center

The acronym CERRA stands for, Centre for Research in Religious Life and Apostolate. The center is housed in the ultra-learning resource center for the Catholic university of Eastern Africa in Nairobi-Kenya. The Data Centre is a collaboration of the Association of Sisterhoods of Kenya (AOSK), the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) and Tangaza University (TU). CERRA-AFRICA has been made possible through the partnership with, and funding by Conrad Hilton Foundation. CERRA-Africa Data Centre supports Catholic Sisters in conducting and participating in Action-oriented research, empowering them to make decisions about their lives and apostolate based on tangible evidence. The Data Centre also provides mentorship to sisters upscaling their skills and ensuring they have the necessary capacity to enable impactful and sustainable change in their service. The primary focus of the Centre is to create strong networks among Congregations to enhance positive transformations in their lives, ministries, and the communities they serve.

Vision

CERRA-Africa aspires to be a Centre of Excellence for research in Religious life and apostolate, sustainable development, and data repository.

Mission

To strengthen the capacity, collaboration, and knowledge of religious women in tracking critical information on the impact and sustainability of Religious life and Apostolate.

Goal

To collaboratively conduct ethical, internationally-standardized research on religious life and apostolate to enhance data access, research capabilities within religious congregations, and deliver specific interventions.

Specific Objectives

1. Initiating and receiving research proposals from different fields of religious life and Catholic ministries.
2. Facilitating the publication of research findings by Catholic women religious in peer-reviewed journals.
3. Disseminating research findings through symposiums, conferences, webinars, and workshops



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4. Build research capacity and skills among consecrated women religious.
5. Provide reliable and current demographic data to support informed decision-making, research, and trend analysis for consecrated women religious.
6. Identify and address research gaps to develop strategies that improve the effectiveness and wellbeing of consecrated women religious.

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Activities of CERRA-Africa

- 1) Promote diverse and innovative research into various aspects of religious life and Catholic ministries.
- 2) Foster interdisciplinary approaches and contribute new insights for contemporary issues.
- 3) Facilitate the publication and dissemination of high-quality research by Catholic women religious.
- 4) Ensure contributions to broader academic and theological discourse.
- 5) Share findings with wider audiences through symposiums, conferences, webinars, and workshops.
- 6) Encourage dialogue and collaboration among scholars, practitioners, and the faithful to enhance real-world practices.
- 7) Train consecrated women religious as research assistants.
- 8) Empower them to actively contribute to academic research, fostering a culture of continuous learning demographic trends and changes among consecrated women religious.
- 9) Ensure up-to-date information for informed decision-making and planning.
- 10) Track demographic trends and changes among consecrated women religious.
- 11) Critically evaluate research to pinpoint areas needing further investigation.
- 12) Develop strategies to address gaps, enhancing the effectiveness and wellbeing of consecrated women religious.

The activities of the Centre will contribute to the development of best practices, and data gathering procedures, making CERRA-Africa a repository at an African University for ease and accessibility by researchers, Foundations, Congregations and church institutions globally, filling a gap in knowledge dissemination related to catholic sisters and their partners in Africa. Through CERRA-Africa partners will contribute to the education pipeline of both catholic sisters and African nations by weaving research methods at the local level as a social value creation strategy to increase the sisters' competencies to reverse poverty trajectories, as well as to support the development of the women and other underserved populations of their ministries.

Background and Context of the symposium



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The Church establishes its significance in the universe through unique mechanisms that can only be explicated by its Creator. Humanity exists for God, just as the Church exists to serve humanity. The Church, ever since its establishment by Christ, has acknowledged the exclusive position of women within her.

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The presence and impactful contributions of Catholic Sisters and consecrated women religious across Africa and worldwide in different apostolates and prayer activities akin to Mary, the Mother of Jesus and other women in the gospel, are evident through the vast number of religious congregations established in Africa. The upcoming symposium organized by the CERRA-Africa Data Centre will delve into how the charismatic activities of Sisters influence the Church and society at large, attracting attendees from Africa and abroad to discuss the research findings and objectives. The term "consecrated women religious" is used to define women who have chosen a religious lifestyle over a secular one, dedicating their lives to God, as Hoffman's (2011) work portrays. This symposium embraces collaborative efforts of Sisters on local and international levels, aiming to showcase their profound impact through diverse roles, underlining the significance of their work on a global scale.

Rationale of the Symposium

The fundamental objective of this symposium is to unite attendees in a reflective contemplation of the written or witnessed works of sisters, as presented in the diverse services rendered to the Church and society. The existence of consecrated life in the world predates the Church. Historiography indicates that Roman Catholic missionaries to Africa consisted of both men and women who fulfilled complementary functions in the evangelization of God's people. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the extensive presence of consecrated women in the Catholic Church in Africa, there is a dearth of documented information regarding them. Regarding the works and the presence of sisters in Africa, much rhetoric exists. The purpose of this symposium is to facilitate the dissemination of the research conducted by consecrated women religious sisters in Africa and beyond. To achieve this, the CERRA-Africa Data Centre will offer sisters, stakeholders, benefactors, and other mission collaborators an opportunity to reflect on the lives and works of these women. Writers should base their reflections on their encounters with the sisters in the mission, whether it be in educational institutions, the social sector, or any other setting where they have worked together. Numerous individuals have been affected by the remarkably subdued presence of sisters in the world. The term "silent presence" refers to cloistered Catholic nuns, whose interactions with the outside world are considerably more restricted in comparison to the "active" women religious. Sisters, whether as congregations or individuals engaged in evangelization, do the following: in their healing ministry, they restore hope to the sick; as



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educators, they impart practical knowledge that transcends academic boundaries; and in their social ministry, they collaborate with the Church and society to confront pervasive societal issues that threaten humanity. To provide direction for this introspection, four thematic areas have been delineated: education, sister ministries, care for the elderly, and formation.

Thematic Domains

Education

Education, as a fundamental element for human survival, has been a focal point for the Conrad Hilton Foundation through the African Sisters Education Collaboration (ASEC) programs since 2007, providing education to over 6,000 Consecrated Women Religious. The symposium aims to explore the intersection between education and poverty alleviation in society, recognizing education as an indispensable tool not only for personal and spiritual growth but also for community development. Through formal education and professional training, Sisters enhance critical skills and broaden their horizons, ultimately contributing to social, economic, and political development. The significance of education in advancing both individuals and communities, particularly the pivotal role of education in overcoming gender discrimination and fostering gender equality, is a key theme in this symposium, emphasizing the transformative impact of Sisters' education on society's progress and well-being, as cited by Galguera (2015), UNESCO (2015), Roehlkepartain, Patel (2006), and Fredriksen, Kagia (2013).

Formation

John Paul II states that “Formation then is a sharing in the work of the Father who, through the Spirit fashions the inner attitudes of the Son in the hearts of young men and women”

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(July, 1986). According to Umeozor (2018), formation is a procedure in which individuals are supported by a knowledgeable mentor to be receptive to divine invitations, to discover their true selves, and to develop holistically as individuals who internalise the teachings and values of Jesus Christ and fulfil His mission within the Church by the requirements of the religious institute's founding patrimony. Aspiration for religious formation evolves into a lifelong commitment to continuous formation. It consists of the following five areas of emphasis: human, intellectual, doctrinal, social, and spiritual aspects of existence. Fundamentally, religious formation introduces an individual to the knowledge of God, which in turn strengthens their yearning for a more



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profound and intimate connection with Him. Religious life endeavours to shape individuals in their interpersonal relationships. In addition, religious formation conforms to societal and Church-approved moral standards. Religious formation also encompasses spiritual formation, which assists individuals in becoming more profoundly acquainted with God via spiritual exercises, reading, prayer, and the sacraments. In conclusion, formation is concerned with the development and growth of the human being, taking into consideration mental, behavioural, and personal integration. The experience that individuals in formation acquire equips them with the wisdom and self-assurance necessary to confront the unavoidable demands and obstacles of the global community and society at large. Religious formation encompasses significant domains that require contemplation and investigation. The Church's role in religious formation, Church growth in light of religious formation, the content of religious formation and global development, religious formation and interpersonal relationships, and the relevance of religious formation to the mission of the Church are a few of these topics.

Ministries of Consecrated Women Religious in Africa

Consecrated women who adhere to the Catholic Church perform crucial duties in furtherance of the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. Their ministries are principal and not subsidiary. Sisters frequently participate in the following ministries: education, healthcare, social work, pastoral, hospitality, administration, and secretarial. Similar to the missionary era, in locations where sisters are present, one will almost certainly discover a hospital, school, or church that provide not only academic instruction but also moral and spiritual guidance. Using their diverse ministries, religious women have established a foundation for advancement and progress within the Church and society at large.

In particular, they have been leading the way in educational initiatives that aim to improve the condition of impoverished regions in Africa (Salvaterra et al., 2009; Wakahiu, 2013). In addition, these sisters contribute significantly to medical services. They operate hospitals, health centres, and dispensaries to provide an extensive range of medical services to the best of their abilities. Typically, these facilities are theirs to use; consequently, the services they provide are intended to benefit others with the resources that have been bestowed upon them by God. Moreover, Sisters assume a pivotal function in addressing the myriad of societal issues that must be resolved, including human trafficking. As an illustration, the Association of Sisterhoods in Kenya (AOSK) maintains a dedicated station tasked with addressing human trafficking concerns. This desk collaborates with other organisations to rescue victims and reinstate their dignity. Sisters of the Catholic Church are leaders in the fight against climate change. Those who are present during the tree planting activity will be found avidly engaged in the occasion. As advocates, Sisters serve as legal representatives and participants in the pursuit of justice for those who are oppressed, lending a voice to those who lack it. An instance in point is that of Sr. Ephigenia Gachiri, a renowned Kenyan nun, who has achieved publication for her advocacy against female genital mutilation.



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Care for the elderly

The issue of ageing members is a pressing concern in Africa and globally, impacting both secular institutions and religious congregations, including a significant number of elderly individuals or those on the cusp of ageing. Legislative measures, such as those seen in South Africa with the establishment of safeguards for the rights of older persons in 2006, and Kenya's development of the Healthy Ageing and Older Persons' Health Strategy 2022–2026, aim to provide social security and community-based care for the elderly. However, challenges persist, with issues of isolation, financial constraints, and lack of support systems affecting the elderly's access to essential resources and care. Despite efforts such as pension and social protection programmes, gaps in effectiveness arise due to inadequate coordination, financial resources, and government structure, leading to reliance on reserves within religious congregations to address the issue of caring for the elderly.

A study conducted by the CERRA-Africa Data Centre reveals the disparity in age distribution within congregations, as elderly members outnumber younger ones, raising concerns about sustainability and caregiving. The challenges faced by cloistered nuns in providing for elderly community members underscore financial constraints and inadequate resources for medical needs and accommodation. The study highlights the strains faced by these nuns, given their reliance on external contributions for sustenance due to limited income-generating activities, posing additional hurdles in caring for the elderly and ensuring their well-being amidst financial and resource constraints within the religious communities.

Methodology and Structure of the Symposium

The symposium will employ a participatory methodology, providing greater flexibility for all attendees to express their thoughts and reflections. Regarding interaction with participants and adherence to the structured schedule, presenters and their respondents shall comply. The purpose of the paper presentations, and question-and-answer sessions shall be to generate new insights, knowledge, and solutions to the problems raised during the sessions. The methodology of the symposium shall additionally incorporate breakout sessions in addition to plenary sessions.

Plenary Sessions

These sessions shall serve as a forum for experts to engage in high-level dialogues concerning emerging issues, contribute to the body of knowledge, and ruminate on personal experiences in relation to the symposium's themes. Moderators shall ensure that pertinent emergent issues are afforded the opportunity to be highlighted by experts debating various themes.

Breakout sessions

Participants shall have the opportunity to delve more deeply into emerging issues during breakout sessions and presentations. It will be an opportunity for individuals to inquire, express their opinions, and offer recommendations regarding impending obstacles. The selection of these sessions shall be based on the expertise and areas of interest of the participants in order to elicit

Symposium Outcomes