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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Compassion as a Paradigm for Mission:

## Perspectives on Holistic Mission among African Christians in a European Context

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**Abstract:** This paper discusses the virtue of compassion as a paradigm for mission, the concept of compassion in both the African and the biblical context and implications for the lack of compassion. It further considers hindrances to the exercise of compassion among African migrant churches in a European context. The paper concludes that in a distressed world such as ours, the call to show compassion and be each other's keeper as a means of fulfilling the demands of God's mission is non-negotiable for the church.

God's mission is holistic, universal, and driven by compassion. It concerns itself with the task of rescuing and restoring creation of which the human being is an integral part. The call to show compassion and be each other's keeper in a troubled world is a compelling one for God's people. This call also deeply resonates with both African ethics and African religious orientation.

A religious response to the socio-economic challenges of the needy in the context of holistic mission is a core duty of the worldwide church. African migrant churches are the natural home and largest recipients of African migrants be they refugees, asylum seekers or regular migrants in Europe. They face socio-economic challenges such as low education, accommodation, unemployment, language skill, emotional bottlenecks, and legal documentation.

As a compassionate community and God's people, the response of the church to the needs of the people on the margins is significant. Through compassion, the people on the margins are provided with the gospel and a safety net to ease their socio-economic burdens. Such a move does not only help to mitigate the suffering of the poor but it also goes a long way to clarify the gospel proclaimed by Christians.

**Keywords:** Compassion, Response, Holistic, Mission

### 1. Introduction

*"Helping one person might not change the world, but it could change the world for one person" - Anonymous.*

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This paper discusses the virtue of compassion as a paradigm for mission, examines the concept of compassion in the context of the Bible and African ethics. It highlights the implications of uncompassionate acts and identifies the virtue of compassion as a fundamental ingredient to participating in the *missio Dei* (God's mission). It also assesses possible hindrances to the exercise of compassion within the African community in a European context. The paper concludes with actionable recommendations to address the challenges of the poor and guide African migrant churches in compassionate participation in the *missio Dei*. The poor as noted in this paper refers to "the economically and socially disadvantaged" (Sugden, 2021: 17).

Compassion represents the best image of God to the people on the margins, assures them of God's unconditional acceptance, and increases the receptivity of the proclaimed gospel. Although the value of social action and gospel proclamation in mission is well-established, there is a need to emphasise the critical role of compassion in these endeavours, especially when working with economically vulnerable populations. It is in the light of this observation that this paper argues in favour of compassion as a paradigm for mission.

## 2. The *missio Dei* and compassion – 'compati-missio'

Wright submits that: "Compassion is the emotional and volitional response to the suffering of others, rooted in the biblical concept of 'rachamim' (merciful love), which reflects God's own compassionate nature" (Wright, 2006:258). Thus, an exploration of the intersection of the *missio Dei* and the virtue of compassion can create a deeper understanding of God's character and the believer's role in the *missio Dei* as a means of transforming the human society.

The *missio Dei* which aims at rescuing and restoring God's creation profoundly demonstrates compassion. This is because the measure of compassion, expressed by God in his bid to rescue and restore humankind and the created order, is the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. The point here is that compassion is a fundamental part of God's character and the measure of compassion the church is expected to expend as it participates in God's mission is incalculable and geographically scopeless.

Through what this paper refers to as '**compati-missio**' or compassion in mission, Christians shift from passive involvement in God's mission to active, conscious involvement in God's redemptive plan. Jesus exemplified this call in Matthew 14:14, "When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick" – (NIV). Such a call aligns with the missiological expectations of the

worldwide church as it seeks to fully participate in the *missio Dei* (Okesson, 2020:65-93; Tennent, 2010:101; Bosch, 2002:390).

The church's participation in God's mission can consequently be measured by its compassionate responses. Here, the church's attitude, actions, and how the issues of the disadvantaged are prioritized provides the basis to measure its level of compassion. Samuel, looking at the conditions of the poor from the Indian context introduces the element of justice in addressing the conditions of the poor. He asserts that at the heart of addressing poverty are theological themes such as justice, empowerment, and equality. This view reminds the Christian community that the Bible enjoins them to relate to the poor and address poverty through justice and love (Samuel, 2021:10-12).

While the element of justice is critical in addressing the conditions of the poor, it can be postulated that justice is recognised when there is compassion. This is because compassion acknowledges the inherent worth and dignity of all individuals, promotes restorative justice, highlights the impact of systemic injustices and fosters empathy and understanding. Compassion understood in this sense does not compromise justice but serves as a critical companion of justice.

Due to the contemporary international human migration largely from the Global South to the Global North, the responsibility of the church in the Global North to engage not only in the compassionate proclamation of the gospel but also in compassionate social action has attained a new dimension (Hanciles, 2008:1; Walls, 2017:51).

Understandably, provision of food and clothing for the people on the margins is not enough. The church's quest to participate in the *missio Dei* through compassionate acts requires that its social interventions have a long-term effect given that the challenges of the contemporary world have deep roots and many dimensions.

### 3. The contemporary world

It is quite obvious that the contemporary world is bedevilled with many social, economic, political, cultural, and spiritual challenges. Some of the challenges facing the world today are poverty, wars, pandemics, racism, economic inequalities, financial crises, identity crises, international human migration, and incapacitation. The aforementioned challenges globally arise on the account of bad governance, geopolitics, natural disasters, unfair international trade relations, leadership failure, effects of colonialism, bad individual choices, greed, and the breakdown of the family system among others.

The effect of the challenges identified is the creation of a world where those in privileged positions continue to live affluently while the poor and disadvantaged suffer endlessly. Lamenting on the lack of morality and compassion in the Ghanaian context, Kudadjie portrays the rich and powerful in society who show no compassion as: “pompous, extravagant, materialistic, and vain” (Kudadjie, 1995:48).

Samuel advocates for a situation where those with privilege and wealth use their resources to invite the poor to experience God’s kingdom, thereby helping to mitigate the effects of poverty. He states: “Inviting the poor to enter and experience God’s kingdom requires wealthy Christians to demonstrate their personhood as God’s children in the stewardly use of their wealth, wisdom, and skills. In their stewardly relationship with the poor, they will enrich their own personhood and flourish as God’s children. Without that they will be poorer as persons, despite their material riches” (Samuel, 2021:10).

Unless there is a significant shift of direction, the contemporary world will likely remain divided into two distinct realities namely: the reality of a world where some have enough of everything imaginable and the reality of a world where scarcity, deprivation, and hopelessness are the order of the day. The portrait of the latter world particularly in the context of African migrants in Europe has survival as its foremost priority. This urge to survive without appropriate external response to at least enhance their chances of survival results in either submissiveness or aggressiveness. Here, submissiveness means acceptance of one’s disadvantaged condition leading to a state of resignation. Aggressiveness on the other hand, refers to an expression of dissatisfaction about one’s condition resulting in radical choices as can be seen in the life of the biblical figure Moses (Cuèllar, 2018:501).

Although, one is not excited about the portrait of the latter world, there appears no end in sight to their challenges and consequent actions for survival until appropriate response is offered by compassionate institutions such as the church and its affiliate organisations.

Indeed, various governments, regional bodies such as the European Union, African Union, and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have over the years attempted to offer a response to the socio-economic challenges that threaten human existence. While their responses could be subjected to thorough academic appraisal, it is the response of religious organizations such as African migrant churches to socio-economic challenges of the poor in the light of compassionate mission that engages attention in this paper.

The church as a body called out to participate in the *missio Dei* i.e., the divine agenda to reclaim and restore God's creation through love and compassion which is defined by the extent to which it compassionately responds to both physical and spiritual concerns of humans irrespective of race, gender, or creed (Bosch, 2002; 2011; WCC, 2012:273). A compassionate response also demonstrates the church's understanding of its existence and preparedness to obey the demands of the *missio Dei* (Okesson, 2020:65-93).

Conversely, the absence of compassionate responses such as provision of legal knowledge through seminars, creation of a migrant support fund to make capital accessible, and language support, speak to the church's lack of awareness of its mandate in the world and the relevance of ***compati - missio***.

In a study conducted by the Empowering Counselling Programme in Chicago, selected African American youths were asked about what made social services provided to them meaningful. Their response was compassion. The act of expending and receiving compassion made all the difference (McCrea and Gillespie, 2021: 441-470).

The benefit of the church majoring on compassion as a paradigm for mission is that it is likely to produce beneficiaries who in turn will extend compassion to others. Overtime, society becomes aware of the value of compassion and there are people who are ready to extend compassion to others.

In the light of the above discussion, the next section discusses compassion in the biblical context.

#### 4.1. Compassion in the context of the Bible

The Bible generally expresses compassion as a call to action, prompting individuals to clothe themselves with compassion as a means of responding to the needs of the disadvantaged in a manner that leads to transformation (Colossians 3:12). The biblical understanding of compassion is rooted in God's demonstration of love towards humanity and the created order.

Two words mostly used to express compassion in the Bible are ***Splagchnizomai*** and ***Rakhum***. In the New Testament, the Greek word ***splagchnizomai***, translated as compassion connotes the idea of stirring of the inward parts of the human person. Literally, it is like twisting of the intestines (cf. Matthew 9:36; Luke 7:12-13).<sup>2</sup> The Old

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<sup>2</sup> <https://terranwilliams.com>. Online source [2024, 23 June].

Testament uses the Hebrew word **Rakhum**, translated as compassion. It expresses the image of a mother caring for her vulnerable and helpless baby (cf. 1 Kings 3:23-25; Psalm 91:4). This imagery conveys both an intense emotion and commensurate action of care towards a weak human being.<sup>3</sup>

On the strength of the meaning conveyed by the words i.e. **Splagchnizomai** and **Rakhum**, it is safe to suggest that compassion is love and care expressed in tangible ways to reduce the suffering and pain of the marginalised in the long term and uphold the dignity of humanity. Acts of compassion indubitably validate the proclaimed gospel in the quest for holistic mission (Ireland (ed.), 2017:10; Porter, 2006:101).

In his article: *‘Compassion and Social Reform: Jesus the Troublemaker’*, Mangalwadi, makes the point that: “compassion for the suffering individual and concern for the glory of God were undoubtedly the prime motives of Christ’s service” (Mangalwadi, 2003: 193).

Sugden, stressing on Luke 4:18, points out that: “Jesus’ focus was on the poor. He himself became poor (2 Cor 8.9). Jesus started his ministry in Galilee (a place of the dispossessed and outcast), not in Jerusalem, as a judgment on the powerful of Jerusalem; his ministry was with the sick, the Samaritans, those branded as sinners and the socially rejected. It was not confined to such, but he identified its nature with reference to them; his proclamation and demonstration were good news to the poor” (Sugden, 2021:19-20).

For the church therefore, the issue of compassion towards the poor is not only central to the practice of the Christian faith but to life.

#### 4.1.1. Treatment of aliens

Biblically, God’s people are encouraged to show compassion in the light of their own relationship with God. Deuteronomy 10:19, for example states: “*So you, too, must show love to foreigners, for you yourselves were once foreigners in the land*”. Foreigners and strangers are usually people on the margins due to various social, cultural, and economic challenges confronting them. Ancient Israel had been a stranger before and knew what it was to be a stranger in a foreign land. God’s command was for them to reciprocate with strangers.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://livingproof.co>. Online source [2024, 23 June].

God in his interactions with Israel revealed himself as a compassionate being. Consequently, Israel's election was solely based on God's compassionate nature and not because they qualified. The call to be compassionate is thus predicated on two fundamentals. Firstly, Israel had been in need of compassion as a stranger before, and secondly, Israel was selected out of God's compassion (Bosch, 2006).

This image of Israel painted by Bosch mirrors the situation of believers in the New Testament era. Having received compassion from God even as sinners, God's people are required to show compassion toward the needy. Love and compassion are therefore old religious requirements. When effectively deployed by the church and the believing community, the poor and marginalised in society are greatly assisted. The church on the other hand is saved from judgment and condemnation. It is in the light of this religious demand that African migrant churches are reminded of the need to respond compassionately to the people on the margins around them.

To reinforce the aforementioned point, Brueggemann submits that, "Compassion constitutes a radical form of criticism, for it announces that the hurt is to be taken seriously, that the hurt is not to be accepted as normal and natural but is an abnormal and unacceptable condition for humanness" (Brueggemann, 1978: 45).<sup>4</sup>

When God's people understand the plight of the needy and the importance of compassion in the light of Brueggemann's observation, their attitudes, and actions toward the people on the margins will be radically altered.

#### 4.1.2. The parable of the Sheep and the Goats

To emphasise the need for a compassionate response to the needs of the people on the margins, Jesus Christ told this parable in Matthew 25: 31-46. The verse 40 – 44 reads:

*40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' 41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' 44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' – NIV.*

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Brueggemann, (1979). *The Prophetic Imagination*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press



At the heart of this parable is the intent to discourage self-centredness and encourage compassion towards the poor i.e., the hungry, sick, imprisoned, and stranger summarily referred to as the “least of these”. Following the universal interpretation model, the inclusive element embedded in the parable is emphasised (Lutz, 2005: 267-274; Brown, 2016:12-16). The universal interpretation model also resonates well with the African worldview of defining the individual in the context of the community and the duty to contribute to the common good (Gyasi, 2022:1-2).

The discourse for a compassionate religious response to the needs of the disadvantaged from this viewpoint elevates compassion beyond a theoretical participation in the life of the sufferer. A compassionate response demonstrates an active participation in the life of the sufferer. Through a compassionate response, the church gives itself the opportunity to taste and share in the suffering of the disadvantaged for a considerable period (Ireland (ed.), 2017; Porter, 2006:101).

#### 4.1.3. Healing at the Pool of Bethesda

Healing is one of the vital consequences of the act of compassion. Asclepius, the Greco-Roman god credited with surgery, wellbeing and health is historically associated with the pool of Bethesda. The pool of Bethesda is in the Hebrew rendered as “house of mercy”. It was a location where sick people demonstrated faith in miraculous healing. Many in the lands ruled by the Emperor of the Roman Empire were said to be dedicated to Asclepius. Justin Martyr alludes to this when he noted: “When the Devil brings forward Asclepius as the raiser of the dead and healer of all diseases, may I not say that in this matter likewise, he has imitated the prophecies about Christ?” (Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, the Jew, 69).

In the specific case of the lame man lying at the pool of Bethesda as recorded in John 5:1-15, we find a story laden with many themes. It is however the theme: “Be each other’s keeper” that jumps up for discussion since the idea it espouses is fundamental to a compassionate response to the needs of the disadvantaged.

The incident possibly occurred when Jesus Christ was in the first half of his public ministry on earth even though the Bible does not explicitly state this. According to verse 7 – 9, Jesus responded to the need of the lame man by healing him. It reads: *“Sir, the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.”* At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The lame man healed by Jesus Christ had been sick for 38 years and most likely spent more than half that number of years at the pool of Bethesda. For all these years, he did not get anyone to respond to his situation except perhaps the person who carried him there if he did not crawl there himself. If someone carried him to the pool, that action can be considered charitable and extremely commendable. His predicament sadly became his way of life and he submitted to it.

The failure of others to respond to his condition eroded his sense of self-help. His survival and possible transformation thus depended upon external response. This external response required much more than proclamation of the gospel. He needed someone to carry him into the pool when the water was stirred or heal him as Jesus Christ did.

Although it is true that there are people who play the victim to court public sympathy, beg for alms and exploit the kindness of individuals and the church, there are always genuinely needy people around begging for a compassionate response. The number of years the lame man spent at the pool of Bethesda indicts his family, the state/society, and the church/religious people for a lack of compassion.

#### 4.1.3.1. Indictment on the family

According to, 1 Timothy 5:8, we read: "Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever". This admonishing from the New Testament challenges the believing community to rethink their sense of care toward members of their family. For the lame man's family members to have neglected him for such a long-time smacks of a lack of compassion.

In the context of African traditional ethics, there is emphasis on the importance of the family, communal living, and the value and dignity of the human person. Members of a particular family are encouraged to look out for one another. Blood, it is said, is thicker than water. So, African traditional ethics underscores the importance of the family and the connectedness of its members (Gyekye, 1998).

These perspectives ought to awaken African migrant Christians to their responsibilities toward the people on the margins around them. When African migrant churches fail to assist their disadvantaged African brothers and sisters, they remain unattended to at the 'pool of Bethesda'.

#### 4.1.3.2. Indictment on the state and society

While his family could be held liable, the society is equally guilty from both the biblical and African perspectives. In Proverbs 19:17, we read: "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward them for what they have done." Additionally, the parable of the Good Samaritan as recorded in Luke 10:25-37, provides a blueprint for the exercise of compassion by members of the society.

Commenting on the need for communalism in the African context, Mbiti, states: "I am because we are, and because we are, therefore I am". His thought highlights the importance of communal living and a critique of the promotion of individualism (Mbiti, 1969). The consciousness to define existence in the collective sense and appreciate the importance of interdependence is a trait expected of God's people. It is also a fundamental principle of the Christian faith without which greed, self-centredness, and nepotism becomes the prevailing custom.

Unfortunately, in contemporary times, the sense of communalism and humanism among Africans for example is fast giving way to individualism and an unabated urge for greed. The continuous perpetuation of the aforementioned retrogressive human attributes further exacerbates the condition of the people on the margins and serves as an indictment on both the state and society.

#### 4.1.3.3. Indictment on the church/ religious people

According to Deuteronomy 16:16, and John 5:1, three times in a year, Jewish males are required to travel to Jerusalem to celebrate important festivals, namely: (i) The Festival of Passover and Unleavened Bread, (ii) The Festival of Pentecost also referred to as the Festival of Harvest or the Festival of Weeks, and (iii). The Festival of Shelters or Tabernacles.

Interestingly, all the visitors to Jerusalem and those who lived in the city passed by the lame man and many others who were at the pool of Bethesda to engage in religious festivals but failed to offer a compassionate response to their plight. Satisfying a religious requirement appears to have been the focus rather than extending help to the disadvantaged. Religious people and the church entrusted with a divine mandate to participate in God's mission i.e., *missio Dei*, offered a one-sided response in their approach to the *missio Dei* in this context. They looked only to the spiritual dimension of obedience to the *missio Dei* and neglected the physical concerns of the poor around them.

A critical assessment of Christianity practiced by Africans on the African continent and those in the diaspora typifies this anomaly. African churches have the numbers and conditions to be on the upward trajectory. Indeed, some scholars have suggested unequivocally that in contemporary times, Africa is the heartland of Global Christianity (Anderson, 2013: xvi; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005:1; and Jenkins, 2007:1).

However, a recognisable chasm exists in terms of what could be considered as the theory of mission and practice of mission in the African Christian space. This chasm diminishes the effectiveness of African Christianity. The need to address the disconnect between worship life and impact on society is a crucial one.

Scholars like Wuthnow have noted the importance of offering practical solutions to the plight of the people on the margins rather than verbally discussing it. Sadly, many religious people and the church have taken their eyes off compassion as a paradigm for mission (Wuthnow, 2011:1-21).

In research conducted by the author to emphasise the importance of religious response to the plight of the poor, the response of selected African Pentecostal churches to the plight of African refugees and asylum seekers in a European context was studied within a defined timeframe. The focus of the study was to gain an in-depth knowledge of the situation of African refugees/asylum seekers and the response of the church to their plight (Gyasi, 2022).

Some of the prominent findings of the study are as follows:

One, there is a lack of social action policy in the selected churches raising concerns about the place of social action in their missionary engagements. What exists is a welfare policy which catered for specific needs of members in the church. Eligibility was hinged on members' ability to pay either tithe or welfare dues.

Two, the selected churches were not proactive to the needs of African refugees and asylum seekers in the context. They waited till they were approached for assistance before a response was offered. Those who were not able to put forward a request did not get any assistance.

Three, the selected churches in the research context, in spite of their lack of proactivity towards the needs of their disadvantaged kinsmen, remain a useful agent for reception and integration of Africans. They remain a useful contact for language support, information about employment, accommodation and in many informal ways facilitated the integration of African refugees/asylum seekers.

The findings of the study speak to the core issue of assisting the disadvantaged noted in the social justice passages discussed earlier in this paper i.e., Deuteronomy 10:19; Matthew 25:31-46; and John 5:1-15.

#### 4.2. Compassion in the African context

There is a remarkable similarity between the biblical understanding of compassion and the African cultural appreciation of its value and significance. Among the Akans of Ghana, a number of words are used to express the concept of compassion. For example, the Akan word **ayamyie** is sometimes used. The word **ayamyie** emphasises goodness or good deeds that emanates from the deepest part of the stomach such as the intestine. Thus, the internal organs in the stomach are stirred to generate appropriate responses to help the poor.

Other words like **Abadaye** which literally means the lying place of a baby i.e. the womb, is also used to depict compassionate acts. Just like **ayamyie**, **abadaye** also draws attention to the source of the response towards the poor and disadvantaged which is the internal part of the stomach.

Akan words like **tema** which is rendered as being considerate and **ahumobo atenka** which is understood as the act of putting oneself in the poor person's shoes to feel what the person feels so that appropriate action is taken, are commonly used to represent compassion and empathy. Thus, among the Akans of Ghana, words for compassion and empathy are mostly used interchangeably.

Following the Akan's understanding of compassion, it is a common sight to witness the public recognition of citizens or indigenes who demonstrated compassion over a period of time at traditional durbars by their chiefs and elders. This is done to encourage others to be compassionate. Any indigene or citizen in the traditional African society who fails to show compassion especially in critical situations is judged as **omambofo** i.e., a nation wrecker. For their punishment, such persons are excommunicated from society.

The Akan concept of compassion is no different from the South African concept of **ubuntu**. The philosophy behind the concept of **ubuntu** is intrinsically about the exercise of compassion. It teaches that each person's life is connected with the other and that personal power and advantage should be exercised in a manner that enriches everyone's life. **Ubuntu** goes beyond an African philosophy or concept. It represents African spirituality and undergirds African's ethical consciousness. It is about the

African culture instilling in the African virtues such as compassion, human dignity, and reciprocity.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, the exercise of compassion among Africans is an expression of goodness towards the marginalised in an active and conscious manner. It is expressed with utmost commitment to transform the situation of the people on the margins.

The African's understanding of compassion as explained in this section places an obligation on them to embody the virtue of compassion for the good of humanity irrespective of where they find themselves. It is against this background that African migrant congregations are expected to return to the original ideals of the African society and compassionately respond to the needs of their kith and kin among them.

## 5. Hindrances to compassion

Although religious people generally accept the responsibility their faith places upon them to exercise compassion beyond the walls of their congregations, it is still a hard task for many. From the perspective of African migrant mission engagement, the following reasons could be advanced as possible hindrances to the exercise of compassion without justifying them:

(i) *Strong social safety nets* – In contexts where the government's social safety net is functional, and NGOs are available and active, religious people tend to pay less attention to the plight of the poor and marginalised. After all, the social department will take care of the poor, they say. The downside of this situation is that the less active the church for example is in exercising compassion, the less compassionate it becomes. Strong social safety nets by governments therefore in some sense emerges as a hindrance to compassionate acts by religious people.

(ii) *Mistrust* – The church receives requests for assistance from the poor in society. While some of these requests are genuine, others are fraught with deceit. There are also instances where a request for assistance is made under the pretext of joining the church but this does not happen after the request is honoured. The incidence of insincerity on the part of some needy persons has led to the situation where many who are in the position to assist feel reluctant. The negative past experiences with some needy persons who received assistance in the hope that they were going to stay with

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<sup>5</sup> Chika Onyejiuwa Ubuntu: An African culture of human solidarity. Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN) June 1, 2017. <https://aefjn.org/en/ubuntu-an-african-culture-of-human-solidarity-2/>. [2024,09 July].

the congregations, but disappeared, is a chief hindrance to the exercise of compassion although not justified.

(iii) *The focus of mission* – In churches where social action is seen as an addendum to its calling, little or no attention is paid to social issues. Such defective understanding of mission falls short of compassionate mission. In the end, mission is conceived of as only proclamation of the gospel and prayer in the power of the Holy Spirit.

(iv) *Lack of social action policy* -This leaves compassionate social action to the whims and caprices of church leaders. Such a situation does not bode well for the church's quest to engage in mission holistically. A well thought out social action policy offers direction and makes the church's mission endeavours concrete.

## 6. Conclusion

The complexity of challenges facing the world today make compassion as a paradigm for mission a source of hope for the poor and marginalised. This is because the *missio Dei* requires that both the spiritual and physical dimensions of God's creation are catered for within the context of compassion. Therefore, in participating in God's mission, the church must not be one-sided in its approach. The need for '*compati-missio*' is without question in a world such as ours.

African migrant Christians can express compassion towards their kith and kin in a European context through provision of legal orientation, access to capital, quality information, counselling, mentoring relationships, job referrals, language skills, accommodation, and social empathy.

Additionally, it is important for all to appreciate that our world has no future if there is no compassion. Compassion must therefore be viewed as the paradigm for mission. In a globalized world faced with unnumbered predicaments, we are compelled to learn that no one is safe when others are unsafe.

For the poor and marginalised in society such as African refugees and asylum seekers in a European context, the church is more than a religious institution. It represents a context for multiple functions. It is this notion of the church's importance that informs the following recommendations:

- (i) The need for a comprehensive understanding and approach to mission praxis within African migrant churches. Such a move will help situate compassion in its rightful place as the church participates in the *missio Dei*.

- (ii) The need for a workable social action policy founded on compassion. In this way, the focus will be to assist the people on the margins regardless of such people's decision to join the church or otherwise.
- (iii) The formation of volunteer groups for compassionate social action. Through such a group, the church will not only gain the platform to assist the poor but also offer the volunteers the opportunity to develop the virtue of compassion which is essential for the Christian life.

Finally, let me emphasise the thesis of this paper by quoting the late Pope Francis. He said: "We have to state, without mincing words, that there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor. May we never abandon them".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis. (2013). *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel). Apostolic Exhortation, November 24, page 48.



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