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The Legacy of Margaret Sidi Kadzomba (1942-2004) and her Impact on Church Growth¹²⁴

By Everlyn Chadi Kombe



Margaret Sidi Kadzomba (1942-2004) worked among the Agiryama people in Kenya's Coast Province, significantly contributing to the growth of the church. Influenced by the Agiryama belief that problems stemmed from witchcraft, she taught Christianity as a way to overcome it. Despite facing persistent patriarchal challenges, she inspired many men and women to engage actively in church and community life. With unwavering faith and determination, Margaret became a valued evangelist committed to advancing God's purpose as a humble servant.

Early Life and Faith

Margaret Sidi Kadzomba was born in 1942 and passed away in 2004. She was raised in Kaloleni village, in Kilifi County, among the Agiryama people. The Agiryama are one of the nine subgroups collectively known as the Mijikenda, a Bantu-speaking community that inhabits the coastal ridge of Kenya. The term *Mijikenda*, meaning "nine subtribes" or "nine villages," refers to the following subgroups: Adigo, Aduruma, Akambe, Akauma, Ajibana, Aribe, Arabai, Achonyi, and Agiryama.¹²⁵

Margaret came to faith during an open-air evangelistic crusade led by the late Reverend Benson Shisoka. At the time, she was living in Kiembeni, Mombasa County, and soon after, she joined Kiembeni Baptist Church, where Rev. Shisoka was the pastor. She was baptized there and grew steadily in the teachings of the church. In time, she discerned her calling and served faithfully and tirelessly until her passing away.

The Challenge of Patriarchy

Kiembeni Baptist Church emerged from the Southern Baptist tradition, which is historically rooted in patriarchy.¹²⁶ As a result, the role of women in ministry has been, and remains, highly restricted. For instance, the Kenya Baptist Convention, whose

¹²⁴ See Photo Index in Appendix 6, page 79.

¹²⁵ Johnson Mwangudza has highlighted key elements of the Agiryama culture in his book, which has been instrumental in understanding Margaret Sidi's worldview, given her Agiryama background.

¹²⁶ According to the *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, patriarchy refers to systems of legal, social, economic, and political relations that affirm and enforce the authority of male heads of households over dependent members. (Letty M. Russell and J. Shannon Clarkson, *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1996).

constitution is modeled on that of the Southern Baptist Convention, prohibits women from holding leadership positions that involve teaching or exercising religious authority over men, citing scriptural justification for this stance.

Patriarchy remained a persistent challenge Margaret faced in ministry. Women were only recognized as “ministers” if they prepared and served tea, meals, or snacks during pastors’ meetings, an expectation she firmly rejected. As a result, she was often at odds with church leadership. Nevertheless, she never allowed such limiting ideologies to hinder her from fully expressing her calling. She had unwavering faith in her God-given assignment and pursued it with determination. At times, some church elders even went so far as to label Margaret a temptress.¹²⁷

They often referenced the story of Eve in Genesis and related it to the passage in Matthew 5:28-29. However, these elders never saw themselves as at fault. They argued that by consistently attending every ministry event, even during her “unclean days,” she was causing men to look at her lustfully. Arguably, her ministry was a deliberate effort to challenge and deconstruct patriarchy. In many ways, her work aligned with the mission Mercy Oduyoye championed. Margaret fought tirelessly for equality, paving the way for women to serve God without facing injustice.

Kipangajeni

Margaret became a valuable evangelist who made a significant contribution to mission work. However, her efforts and role have not been sufficiently recognized or appreciated. Despite facing opposition within the church, she embraced the role of a local missionary, traveling to preach the gospel. Between 1991 and 1993, she frequently visited Kipangajeni, Kwa Mzee Mtinda wa Nguma, where she established a home fellowship. Her approach to spreading the gospel was sensitive to the customs of the Agyryama people, aiming to foster a distinctly Agyryama form of Christianity.

Margaret was distinguished by her zealous spirit and steadfast dedication. She was willing not only to live but also to die in obedience to her faith and commitment to Christ. Rain or scorching sun could not deter her; she labored faithfully under all conditions. In Kipangajeni, she joyfully embraced her God-given mission, thinking little of herself and focusing wholeheartedly on the people she believed she was called to serve. Rather than waiting for them to come to church, Margaret would go out to meet them where they were. She even ventured into the Mangweni, a place where the traditional local liquor, *mnazi*, was sold and people gathered to drink and make merry. There, she would engage them in conversations about Jesus and sing with them in Agyryama. Some of the songs she composed spontaneously, drawing on their responses and using familiar Agyryama tunes, but with biblical messages woven in. She welcomed the use of their traditional musical instruments, such as the *ndonga* and *kayamba*, to

¹²⁷ Jane, Interview with author, November 14, 2023, personal interview. Jane was a member of Kiembeni Baptist Church and a close friend of Margaret Sidi.

create beautiful melodies that resonated with their hearts.¹²⁸

The Mangweni fellowship was one of the ways Margaret shared the unfathomable love of Jesus Christ with all who would listen. She consistently emphasized the reality of the one true and living God, who alone is worthy of worship. Through this ministry, many individuals previously consumed by drinking *mnazi* (palm wine) encountered Jesus Christ. One such person, a *mgema* (traditional palm wine tapper), came to faith in Christ, joined the Kipangajeni AIC church under Pastor Joshua, and remains a committed believer actively serving in ministry to this day.

Margaret faced the challenge of lacking formal education. Orphaned at a young age, she was raised by a cousin who treated her as a housemaid. Nevertheless, she clearly understood that the ultimate goal of evangelism was to guide a convert from the point of decision to becoming a committed believer. She ensured that each new believer was firmly rooted in a local church fellowship. In line with this conviction, she worked closely with local pastors to ensure that converts were trained and equipped to take their place as productive members of the body of Christ.

Margaret assisted the ministers in organizing follow-ups, and she managed to establish a sound and effective discipleship program. She also provided counseling aimed at getting rid of the Agryama traditional elements that do not add value to life. These had to be replaced with new biblical principles to ensure that those who had believed do not become nominal Christians. Margaret supported the ministers by coordinating follow-up visits and launching a sound, effective discipleship program. She also counseled new believers to shed unhelpful Agryama traditional practices, replacing them with sound biblical principles to ensure their faith matured.

Among the Agryama people, religion permeates every aspect of life so thoroughly that it is nearly impossible to separate it from daily activities. This affirms John Mbiti's assertion that Africans are notoriously religious. Margaret understood that the community's religious beliefs were deeply ingrained in their identity, giving them a profound sense of belonging. For instance, when a man sought to marry, he was required to pay a bride price accompanied by numerous rituals—some intended to cover even future children born from the union. Soon after the marriage, further rituals were conducted with the help of a medicine man to cleanse the home and install spiritual protection.

To most Agiryama people, failure to perform these rituals was believed to bring misfortune upon a marriage. Margaret had a deep understanding of the community's socio-religious beliefs and practices, and she presented the Gospel with cultural sensitivity. While remaining faithful to the message of Christ, she guided the people toward a biblical worldview. She labored tirelessly to help them come to a genuine acknowledgment of Jesus Christ. As a result, many began to seek God in earnest, leading to a true transformation. Margaret also established a similar fellowship in Nguutatu, Kwa Hussein Deri village, beginning in 1993. She visited the village every

¹²⁸ Rev. Shadrack Dhuli, interview with author, November 6, 2023, personal interview. Rev. Dhuli was one of the key informants and a leader at Kiembeni Baptist Church. He currently serves as the Senior Pastor of Christ Formation Church in Kilifi.

Friday to lead evangelistic fellowship, and this ministry was equally successful.

The Challenge of Witchcraft

Kipangageni was one local area deeply affected by the fear of witchcraft. Most homesteads were protected by the power of *finjo* and *vingango*. *Fingo* referred to a form of totemic power, while *vingango* were ancestral spirits. People also wore *hirizi*, charms believed to offer protection. Even the village elder played a role in maintaining, sustaining, and perpetuating this traditional belief system. This belief in witchcraft had held the community back from development.

Margaret was cautioned to be careful because of the dangerous power of witchcraft in the area. She was told that even trained clergy had previously worked there but were unable to overcome the forces that held the people captive. As a result, the villagers relied on protecting themselves from witchcraft. Witchdoctors were consulted at every major stage of life: from pregnancy, childbirth, naming, and initiation, to marriage and death, with rituals performed to ensure the wellbeing of the community. These beliefs were deeply woven into the fabric of society, giving rise to a variety of animistic practices.

Margaret relied on the power of the living God throughout her mission. Although she faced numerous challenges, including physical illness, moments of confusion, and opposition from church leaders, her persistence ultimately led to victory. Her witness in the region has historically demonstrated that Christianity is a powerful agent of transformation, capable of significantly improving the standard of living of the people. The teachings and preaching she shared were deeply connected to the local culture; rather than seeking to change the culture, she aimed to nurture Christians within their own cultural context. This approach aligns closely with the principles of contextualization as articulated by various missiologists.

Denominational Barrier

Due to her limited formal education, Margaret did not engage with many of the questions that typically concern missiologists, such as strategic planning for evangelization or fundraising. Her approach was simple and Spirit-led. She would wake up with a sense of mission, ask those around her for transport fare, and as soon as she had enough, she would leave Kiembeni and travel to Kipangageni. She often stayed there for one or two weeks, spending her time going from place to place, telling people about Jesus. Those who responded positively and chose to follow Christ were connected to local churches. Margaret ensured they were nurtured in their faith and encouraged to grow into fruitful believers. Although she came from the Baptist tradition, she never allowed denominational boundaries to limit her work. She placed new converts in any nearby church and collaborated with the local pastors to facilitate their integration and spiritual growth.

Margaret's ministry at Kiembeni Baptist Church faced significant challenges,

primarily because she did not strictly adhere to Baptist denominational principles. As a result, her work was undermined and made increasingly difficult, ultimately prompting her to leave the church. She later joined Ushindi Baptist Church, where she was warmly welcomed and fully embraced. Under the leadership of Bishop Joseph Maisha, her ministry expanded significantly, and she planted a home-based church in her own homestead within Kiembeni Estate, where she took on a leadership role.

Margaret ministered faithfully through counseling, teaching, encouraging others, praying, and offering various forms of support. Her impact was so profound that fellow believers affectionately referred to her as Mama Kiembeni, a title reflecting her deep spiritual influence in the area. As the fellowship grew, however, a new challenge emerged: some members expressed the need for a male pastor. Although Ushindi remained a Baptist church, and patriarchal attitudes resurfaced, the matter was addressed constructively, thanks to Bishop Maisha's support for women in ministry.

However, this situation still impacted her ministry. She worked closely with Bishop David¹²⁹ of the New Testament Church, who agreed to the request to provide a male minister from his congregation. Since Bishop Maisha would not send them a male pastor, Bishop David appointed Pastor Amos. Together, they served the growing fellowship. When Margaret's home could no longer accommodate the expanding congregation, they acquired land, constructed a church building, and relocated. Margaret passed away while still serving in this church, which remains standing to this day.

Halfway House Ministry

The Halfway House ministry refers to the compassionate work Margaret carried out among individuals who were broken-hearted and in need of healing on their journey toward wholeness. She dedicated herself to addressing the deep traumas people faced, helping them transition from a state of dysfunction to becoming functional and active members of both the church and the wider society. Margaret undertook this ministry in collaboration with the church, the Nguutatu and Kipangajeni ministries.

Margaret desired to demolish the satanic strongholds of witchcraft on people. Whenever she began the process of healing, she would not give up on a person until the person became a fully functional and self-supporting individual. She believed that if one is in the process of deliverance, other believers must be praying and follow-up on the individual. A lack of follow-up may lead to the individual going back to the old appetites of the flesh. As a result, the individual may experience more distress and stronger enslavement than before (Luke 11:24-26).

Margaret was deeply committed to breaking the satanic strongholds of witchcraft in people's lives. Whenever she began the process of healing and deliverance, she remained steadfast, walking with the person until they became a fully functional and self-supporting individual. She firmly believed that deliverance required the ongoing

¹²⁹ Bishop David (not his real name), interview with author, January 17, 2024, personal interview.

support of other believers through prayer and consistent follow-up. Without this support, she warned, individuals could easily relapse into former fleshly desires. Such a return, she noted, could result in even greater distress and deeper bondage than before (cf. Luke 11:24–26). In line with this belief, she served at Wema Children’s Center in Bamburi and at the Compassion International at Kiembeni Baptist Child Development Center.

At Wema Center, she visited every Wednesday from 1999 until her death in 2004, offering counseling and prayer to children undergoing rehabilitation. Many of these children had suffered severe abuse, leaving them with deep psychological and emotional wounds. She saw her counseling work as part of discipleship and holistic ministry, taking time to work with each child individually. Inspired by Scripture, especially James 2:16, she was deeply committed to helping each one move toward healing and wholeness.

In addition, she rescued destitute children who had been abandoned by their parents or guardians. Depending on their specific needs, she would register them in appropriate care centers. Those living around Bamburi and with a place to stay were enrolled at the Kiembeni Baptist Children Development Center, where she served as their guardian. Those without a place to live were taken to Wema Center, which provided residential care.

One of the children Margaret rescued was Mary Zawadi. At the age of nine, Mary had been brought to Kiembeni Estate to work as a house girl. During one of her evangelistic visits, Margaret discovered the abuse Mary was enduring at such a tender age. Upon further inquiry, she learned that Mary was an orphan and had been sent to work by her aunt, who would come at the end of each month to collect Mary’s wages. Although Mary did all the work, she was never told how much she earned and was subjected to constant torment and abuse.

Margaret reported the situation to the local chief, and Mary was rescued. She was registered with Compassion International-Kiembeni, and Margaret took her into her home. Mary received an education and was fully restored to wholeness. Today, she is happily married and actively serving God at the Redeemed Gospel Church in Likoni. She testifies to God’s goodness and the transformative role Margaret played in her life.

This is just one example of many who were transformed through the Halfway House ministry. Margaret embraced the responsibility of discipleship, recognizing the essential need to cooperate with God in the process of making people whole. This aligns with the principle that mission flows from the triune nature of God. Human institutions like the church are called only to participate in the mission initiated and sustained by God, motivated by God’s love for humanity. Margaret understood herself as a servant privileged to advance God’s purpose in the world. She held a deeply sincere theological perspective focused on liberating people. Her ministry was grounded in biblical principles of God’s mission (Luke 4:18) and embodied a Gospel-centered approach. She remained unwavering in her commitment to the Gospel, refusing to compromise its truth.

Margaret's Rich Legacy

Margaret Sidi Kadzomba's life and ministry stand as a powerful testament to faith, resilience, and transformative service amid significant cultural and institutional challenges. Despite facing patriarchal opposition and limited formal education, she faithfully pursued her calling with unwavering dedication, contextualizing the Gospel in a way that honored her Agiryama heritage while confronting deeply entrenched traditional beliefs like witchcraft. Her tireless evangelistic work, compassionate discipleship, and commitment to healing broken lives not only transformed individuals and communities but also challenged restrictive norms within the church. Margaret's legacy continues to inspire, reminding us that true ministry flourishes when rooted in love, cultural sensitivity, and steadfast obedience to God's mission.

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