

## **How African Small Christian Communities Implement the Pastoral and Missionary Vision of Vatican II**

By Joseph G. Healey, MM

### **Abstract**

*As we continue to celebrate the 50-year Anniversary of the Second Vatican Council we recall the historical foundations of African Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the People of God Model of Church and in the communion ecclesiology of Vatican II. A study of five documents of Vatican II reveals that Small Christian Communities are one of the great fruits of the council and an awakening of the church as the People/Nation of God. The founding fathers of AMECEA had a vision of implementing Vatican II's ecclesiology of communion in Eastern Africa that focused on the communion (koinonia) and service (diakonia) aspects. Both African Synods built on the foundations of Vatican II and highlighted the pastoral and missionary role of SCCs. We can look at the praxis of SCCs in Eastern Africa through the lens of the three speakers at the Theological Symposium 2013. Pastoral, parish-based SCCs are part of the "new face" of the parish and a significant part of a new way of being parish from below. The parish is a communion or network of SCCs within the "communion of communities" ecclesiology. We are optimistic that the experience of SCCs as a New Model of Church from the grassroots as witnessed by SCC members in Africa will bring significant changes in new pastoral structures corresponding to our contemporary communion ecclesiology and the ecclesial reality on the local level.*

### **I. Introduction: An Historical Perspective**

The historic [Second Vatican Council](#) took place from 1962 to 1965. The Mass at St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City (Rome, Italy) on 11 October, 2012 was the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and a *Kairos* moment to deepen the vision, spirit and practice of the teachings of this important event. From 21-22 February, 2013 Tangaza University College School of Theology in Nairobi, Kenya celebrated its "Theological Symposium 2013" on "Church and the World: Celebrating the Pastoral Vision of the Second Vatican Council."

As we continue to celebrate the 50-year Anniversary of the Second Vatican Council we recall the historical foundations of Small Christian Communities (SCCs)<sup>1</sup> in the People of

---

<sup>1</sup> There are important distinctions in the Catholic Church worldwide between:

Small Christian Communities (SCCs)

Basic Christian Communities (BCCs)

Base Ecclesial Community (BECs). In Spanish: *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* (CEBs or Christian Base Communities) and in French: *Communautés Ecclesiales de Base* (CEBs). NOTE: The word "base" indicates "from the grassroots" or in sociological terms the "base" of the society (the economically poor and marginated). Base refers to the foundations, the roots of the social scale where people power can shake/influence the structures and established order from below. It highlights the preferential option

God Model of Church and in the communion ecclesiology of Vatican II. SCCs developed as a result of putting this communion ecclesiology and the teachings of Vatican II into practice. Small Christian Communities make real the vision of Vatican II that calls on the Church to be (shine forth as) “a people made one with the unity (brought into unity) from the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (No. 4 of *Lumen Gentium*, the *Dogmatic Constitution of the Church of the Church*). No. 17 of this document refers to the Trinitarian understanding of the church as “the People of God, the Body of the Lord and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>2</sup> No. 26 states:

This Church of Christ is truly present in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful which, united with their pastors, are themselves called churches in the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> For in their locality these are the new people called by God, in the Holy Spirit and in much fullness...In these communities though frequently small and poor, or living far from one another, Christ is present. By virtue of Him the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church gathers together.

No. 10 of *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Lay People*) describes “Church Communities” including different types of ecclesial communities especially the parish.

---

for the poor that so characterizes these communities. The word “ecclesial” emphasizes that these communities are in themselves “church” – church at the most local level. In some Latin American countries BECs are like “chapels” or centers where the sacraments are celebrated.

Living Base Ecclesial Communities. ”In French : *Communautés Ecclésiales Vivantes de Base* (CEVB)

Living Christian Communities (LCCs).

Small Church Communities (SCCs)

Small Faith Communities (SFCs).

Base Communities (BCs)

Small Christian Communities (SCCs) is an umbrella term used in this article and is the common expression for this new way of being church in Eastern Africa. Different terms are used in English on the continent of Africa. Even some writers in French prefer the term SCC because it indicates the “scale” of the communities. The challenge is to create successful “branding.” For example, “*jumuiya*” (the short form of Small Christian Communities in Swahili) is immediately known in East Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Vatican Website, retrieved 30 September, 2011, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641122\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641122_lumen-gentium_en.html)

<sup>3</sup> Another translation of this sentence reads: “The Church of Christ is found in every group of the faithful in a given neighborhood or area who together with their pastors are also called the church in the writings of the *New Testament*.”

In giving enthusiastic support to Base Ecclesial Communities (BECs) Honduran Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga, SDB,<sup>4</sup> Archbishop of Tegucigalpa, Honduras describes them as “the great fruit of Vatican II.” The Kenyan book of prayers and songs, *Tumshangilie Bwana*, has this interesting description: “Small Christian Communities are one of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council and an awakening of the church as the ‘Nation of God.’” A good explanation is found in “Vatican II’s Impact on Small Christian Communities,” in Chapter One in *Communities for the Kingdom: A Handbook for Small Christian Community Leaders* by Irish missionary and theologian Father Kieran Flynn, SPS.

Although the term SCCs is not mentioned specifically in the documents of Vatican II, some of the great theologians of the council emphasized them in their writings in the 1960s. The French theologian Father Yves Congar, OP in *Lay People in the Church* wrote that SCCs are “little church cells wherein the mystery is lived directly and with great simplicity... “the church’s machinery, sometimes the very institution, is a barrier obscuring her deep and living mystery, which they can find, or find again, only from below.” The German theologian Father Karl Rahner, SJ in *The Shape of the Church to Come* wrote: “The church in the future will be one built from below by basic communities as a result of free initiative and association. We should make every effort not to hold up this development, but to promote it and direct it on the right lines.”

After the Second Vatican Council Latin America,<sup>5</sup> Africa and Asia (especially the Philippines) all pioneered the development of a SCC/BCC/BEC Model of Church.<sup>6</sup> After considerable research and debate, many specialists feel that quite independently of one another these three areas of the Catholic Church in the Global South *simultaneously* experienced the extraordinary growth of SCCs. Thus, contrary to some misinformed interpretations, the African experience did not come from Latin America, but developed on its own.

Although 1973 and 1976 are considered the official starting points for SCCs in the AMECEA countries, the seeds were sown earlier. The very beginning of SCCs in Eastern Africa can be traced back to the parishes started by the Maryknoll Missionaries in the Luo-speaking Deanery (especially Nyarombo, Ingri and Masonga Parishes) in North Mara in Musoma Diocese in northwestern Tanzania in 1966. This began with research on the social structures and community values of the African Independent Churches among the Luo Ethnic Group carried out by French sociologist laywoman Marie France Perrin Jassy. The first terms used were *chama* (meaning “small group”) and “small communities of Christians”

---

<sup>4</sup> It is interesting that Rodriguez was appointed to be the coordinator of a group of eight cardinals worldwide established by Pope Francis to advise him and to study a plan for revising the *Apostolic Constitution* on the Roman Curia.

<sup>5</sup> José Marins identifies five features or components central to the Basic Ecclesial Community dynamic: Prayer; Reflection on Reality; Discernment and Decision; Action [Mission]; and Celebration. See José Marins, *Basic Ecclesial Community: Church from the Roots* (Quito: Colegio Tecnico Dom Bosco, 1979), p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> It is generally agreed that this SCC/BCC/BEC Model of Church started with the CEBs in Brazil in 1956. The language was Portuguese.

(forerunner of SCCs).<sup>7</sup> “The [Maryknoll] missionaries focused on the formation of natural communities ...By 1968 Nyarombo Parish had 20 small communities and five were started in a nearby parish.” English diocesan priest Father Gerry Proctor points out this “Catholic experience of SCCs was an African response to an African problem. It was not the copying from another continent of a model of Church that might or might not prove pastorally useful here.”<sup>8</sup>

The actual launching of SCCs/CEVBs in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) goes back to the period 1971-1972 when there was a confrontation between President Mobutu Sese Seko and the Catholic Church. Mobutu’s “authenticity” campaign suppressed the missionary institutes and associations. To meet the crisis the church established the priority of the creation and organization of SCCs. The pioneering and visionary Cardinal Joseph Malula, Archbishop of Kinshasa Archdiocese, DRC stated: “The Living Base Ecclesial Communities are slowly becoming the ordinary place of Christian life with the parish as the communion of the Living Ecclesial Communities.” This included emphasizing lay ministries and implementing Vatican II’s theology of laity, “the People of God.”

The founding fathers of AMECEA<sup>9</sup> had a vision of implementing Vatican II’s ecclesiology of communion in Eastern Africa that focused on the communion (*koinonia*) and service (*diakonia*) aspects. Tanzanian scripture scholar Father Titus Amigi states: “After the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) doors were opened and the Spirit of God brought a new Pentecost with the introduction of Small Christian Communities in Africa.”<sup>10</sup> Tanzanian theologian Father Nicholas Segeja states: AMECEA started laying emphasis “on developing SCCs as a concrete expression of, and realization of, the Church as Family Model of Church which reflects the ecclesiology of communion of Vatican II.”<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> See Marie-France Perrin Jassy, *Forming Christian Communities*, Kampala: *Gaba Pastoral Paper* No. 12, 1970 and *Basic Communities in the African Churches*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973.

<sup>8</sup> Gerry Proctor, *A Commitment to Neighborhood: Base Ecclesial Communities in Global Perspective*, Liverpool: Unpublished MPhil Dissertation, 2012, p. 70.

<sup>9</sup> AMECEA is an acronym for "Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa." It is a service organization for the National Episcopal Conferences of the nine English-speaking countries of Eastern Africa, namely Eritrea (1993), Ethiopia (1979), Kenya (1961), Malawi (1961), South Sudan (2011), Sudan (1973), Tanzania (1961), Uganda (1961) and Zambia (1961). The Republic of South Sudan became independent on 9 July, 2011, but the two Sudans remain part of one Episcopal Conference. Somalia (1995) and Djibouti (2002) are Affiliate Members.

<sup>10</sup> Titus Amigi, “Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo Small Christian Communities in Tanzania,” *Bulletin Dei Verbum* 86/87, 2006,  
[http://www.c-b-f.org/documents/Gemeinschaften\\_e.pdf](http://www.c-b-f.org/documents/Gemeinschaften_e.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Nicholas Segeja, “Summary Notes” on *The Development and Ecclesiology of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in AMECEA Countries*, Nairobi: Unpublished Course Notes, 2010, p. 4.

The AMECEA Study Conference on “The Implementation of the AMECEA Bishops’ Pastoral Priority of Building Small Christian Communities: An Evaluation”<sup>12</sup> took place in Zomba, Malawi in 1979.<sup>13</sup> There were case studies of “Christian Communities in Mbarara Diocese, Uganda” by Ugandan Bishop John Kakubi, “Small Christian Communities in Kigoma Diocese, Tanzania” by Tanzanian Bishop Alphonse Nsabi and “Community Building in an Urban Area in Zambia” by Zambian Bishop Dennis de Jong. The meeting emphasized that SCCs are the neighborhood church that is the embodiment of the One, Holy and Catholic and Apostolic Church and are the best way to renew the church and said: “Structurally the Small Christian Community is the most local unit of the Church...of its very nature it (the family) has to reach out to other families, and the Small Christian Community is made up of several family groups.” So the AMECEA Bishops actually went beyond and expanded the theology accepted by the Second Vatican Council.

If “the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life” (No. 10 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*), then fostering eucharistic communities at all levels – from the SCC Mass in the home to the Sunday Eucharist in the parish church (the “communion of communities” model) – is vitally important. African relationship and community values enrich the meaning of the eucharistic community. A Ganda, Uganda proverb says *Relationship is in the eating together* that can be the starting point for a rich eucharistic theology.

We are reminded that “the pilgrim church is missionary by her very nature (or in another translation “the Church on earth is by its very nature missionary”) for it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she takes her origin, in accordance with the decree [plan] of God the Father” (No. 2 in *Ad Gentes*, the *Decree on the Missionary*

---

<sup>12</sup> Ghanaian scripture scholar and missionary Father Richard Baawobr, MAfr points out: “It might be good to establish five year plans with one or two points to implement during a definite period, with tools and formation in that line. The way you [AMECEA] promoted the Small Christian Communities in the 70s shows that when there is focus and a common drive, things move forward.” “AMECEA Golden Jubilee Celebration 2011: Congratulatory Message of the Missionaries of Africa,” *AMECEA 50 Years of Evangelization in Solidarity: 1961 -- 2011*. Nairobi: AMECEA Secretariat, 2011, p.112.

<sup>13</sup> During a visit to Mombasa Archdiocese in August, 2011 I learned an interesting footnote in SCCs history. Kenyan Father Ernest Mutua, one of the founders of SCCs in the archdiocese, explained that when Kenyan Bishop (later Archbishop) Nicodemus Kirima (who died in 2007) was appointed as Bishop of Mombasa in 1978 he was initially against SCCs. He saw them as an offshoot of Protestant sects in Kenya. But then he went to the 1979 AMECEA Meeting in Malawi and met and talked with dedicated animators of SCCs such as Tanzanian Bishop Christopher Mwoleka, Bishop (who died in 2002) of Rulenge Diocese, Tanzania. Kirima was converted and came back and began to support SCCs starting in his diocese in 1979. This is a good testimony of the learning process that takes place during AMECEA meetings. Ernest Matua in a conversation with the author on 24 August, 2011.

In a subsequent conversation with the now Kenyan Bishop Martin Kivuva, Bishop of Machakos Diocese, he explained that in 1979 Father Matua started SCCs in St. Anne Parish, Mgange Nyika in Taita and the then Father Kivuva started SCCs in Our Lady of Fatima Parish, Kongowea. Martin Kivuva in a conversation with the author on 29 August, 2012.

*Activity of the Church.* There is a well-known saying that “the church does not have a mission. The mission of God has a church.” Fundamentally Christianity is not church-centered but Trinity centered.

Our primary mission is the mission of the trinity. Moved by love, God the Father sends the Son and the Holy Spirit into the world. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (*John* 3:16). Recall Jesus Christ's words to the Apostles after his resurrection: "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me (*John* 20:21).<sup>14</sup> Jesus continues to send SCC members today in the continuation of the trinitarian mission. He sends all of us to "go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation" (*Mark* 16:15) and says: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (*Acts*: 1:8).

Mission is part of the Christian's deepest identity. "Thus it is plain that missionary activity wells up from the Church's inner nature and spreads abroad her saving Faith. It perfects her Catholic unity by this expansion. It is sustained by her apostolicity" (No. 6 in *Ad Gentes*, the *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*). Through Baptism all Christians are called to be missionaries and evangelizers. One theologian has even said, "Baptism is the main ordination."

In a broader context Vatican II's programmatic articulation of mission is found in No. 1 of *Gaudium et Spes* (the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*): "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men [people] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ." American missionary and writer Father Peter Henriot, SJ presently serving in Malawi, points out: "This statement formulates a permanent challenge to the church's self-understanding as a community in mission."<sup>15</sup> One of the charisms of SCCs is their community response to mission. This is rooted in the *New Testament* model of Jesus sending out the disciples and other followers "two by two."

In summary, by highlighting some key sections of five documents of Vatican II I have tried to show how African Small Christian Communities are putting into action and carrying out the pastoral and missionary vision of the council. If one asked SCC members in Eastern Africa, they probably would not be aware of this connection between the Second Vatican Council and the life and activities of their SCCs. But, in fact, they would be "unconsciously" living and practicing this vision on the grassroots, local level.

## **II. Growth of SCCs in Eastern Africa**

Important new ideas and initiatives need a literature. In the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s

---

<sup>14</sup> This was the theme of 2011 World Mission Sunday on 23 October, 2011 in which SCC members actively participated in Africa.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Henriot in Emmanuel Orobator, (ed.), *Reconciliation, Justice and Peace – the Second Africa Synod*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011 and Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2011, p. 239.

especially in Eastern Africa, the growth of SCCs was documented and fostered by many articles and reports in the *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, *AMECEA Documentation Service (ADS)*, *AMECEA Information*, the *Spearhead Series* (formerly *Gaba Pastoral Papers*) of monographs and other publications and communications media. A good summary of the 1970s period is found in the section “Towards Small Christian Communities” in the chapter on “Structural Localization” in Dutch missionary and historian Father Albert De Jong, CSSp’s book *The Challenge of Vatican II in East Africa*.

African SCCs emphasize personal relationships, family bonds, solidarity, and Christian belonging --sharing together, working together, and celebrating together (including meals and entertainment) in the context of African values and customs. Thus SCCs are a concrete expression of, and realization of, the Church as Family of God Model of Church in Africa. We need to explore further the inculturation of this family ecclesiology<sup>16</sup> in Africa and the implications of communion ecclesiology in an African context.

Swiss Fidei Donum priest and historian Father John Baur (who died in 2003) emphasises that SCCs derive from Vatican II’s ecclesiology of the Church as People of God, but are very much a work in process. “It implies that all the faithful fulfill their vocation and mission in the Church, implying a change from the priest-based apostolate to a people based apostolate that demands that the priest assumes the role of a community-minded inspirational minister.”<sup>17</sup> Tanzanian theologian Father Laurenti Magesa points out: “If the pastoral implications of this shift have not been practically fully “digested” in many dioceses in Eastern Africa, as anyone with some ministerial experience in the region will know, there has not been any shortage of theological reflection on this rediscovered ecclesiology of the early church.”<sup>18</sup> He goes on to state:

The best contribution of the ecclesiology of SCCs in Eastern Africa has been to provide a clear theological elaboration of the threefold theological characteristic of these entities. Like any baptized person, each SCC in its members is priestly, prophetic and kingly. As priestly, its life must be based on faith and unceasing prayer to God. As prophetic, it must become an advocate of justice and reconciliation in society. As kingly, it must gather

---

<sup>16</sup> As a sign of the times around the world compare this statement of RENEW International (based in Plainfield, New Jersey, USA)’s prophetic vision for the renewal of the Catholic Church today: “This vision calls the church to become a family of small communities whose shared purpose is to reinvigorate the church and serve the needs of the wider world. RENEW small communities are challenged to explore their own experiences in light of the Gospel and to commit to decisive action to live their faith in the world.” Theresa Rickard, “Strategic Planning Assignment: RENEW International,” New York: Columbia Business School, Executive Education Institute for Not-for-Profit Management, Unpublished paper, 2 May, 2011, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1994, pp. 319-320.

<sup>18</sup> Laurenti Magesa, “A Panoramic View of 25 Years of African Theology in East Africa: Foundations, Developments and Prospects” in *Hekima Review*, Vol. 40 (May, 2009), p. 24.

within itself, without undue discrimination, all those who seek refuge in its fold.<sup>19</sup>

Baur presents the challenge of this prophetic role in describing the growth of SCCs that calls for “public witness to justice and peace, and ecumenical cooperation in development.”<sup>20</sup>

Two important milestones were the 1994 First African Synod that developed the specific ecclesial identity of the Church as Family of God in Africa and the 2009 Second African Synod that focused more on the pastoral and mission activities of this Church as Family of God in Africa, namely to work toward reconciliation, justice and peace. Both synods built on the foundations of Vatican II and highlighted the pastoral and missionary role of SCCs.

Books and articles that we have written in the past 20 years articulate this growth. In pointing out that the attitude toward SCCs in Eastern Africa appears more positive than it is elsewhere on the continent, Nigerian theologian Father Emmanuel Orobator, SJ states:

The 1994 [First] African Synod made a decisive option for the formation and development of SCCs as the privileged means for actualizing the model of church as family. Presently a significant number of African theologians laud the rapid implantation and growth of SCCs, which they judge as the active embodiment and tangible manifestation of “a new way of being Local Church.”<sup>21</sup>

Ugandan historian and theologian Father John Waliggo (who died in 2008) adds:

The [African] bishops could have chosen the Vatican II concept of church as Communion or as People of God. They purposely chose Church as Family; they wanted to use the African family as the model for being and living church. The family model includes everyone, baptized and non-baptized, involving every member. It serves well the emphasis on Small Christian Communities.<sup>22</sup>

An important new addition to the annual Kenya Lenten Campaign is the booklet *Lent: Let Light Shine Out of Darkness... Kenya Lenten Campaign Training Manual for Small Christian Communities* produced by the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission of the Kenya

---

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Baur, *2000 Years*, Second Edition, 2009, p. 391.

<sup>21</sup> A. E. Orobator, *The Church as Family: African Ecclesiology in its Social Context*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2000, p. 24.

<sup>22</sup> John Mary Waliggo, "The Church as Family of God and Small Christian Communities," *AMECEA Documentation Service*, No. 429 (1 December, 1994), p. 1



Conference of Catholic Bishops in February, 2012. In the “Preface” Kenyan Archbishop Zacchaeus Okoth, Chairman of Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, states:

This manual will therefore provide information for the Small Christian Communities on Lent and the Lenten Campaign. This is in recognition that the future of the Catholic Church will be one built from the grassroots. This will be possible through the existence of Small Christian Communities and the realization of the Church as a Family Model community of believers which reflects the ecclesiology of communion of Vatican II.<sup>23</sup>

The importance given to the faith was further emphasized by the decision of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI to celebrate a Year of Faith, beginning on 11 October 2012, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and the twentieth anniversary of the publication of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

The World Synod of Bishops on “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith”<sup>24</sup> took place in Rome, Italy from 7-28 October, 2012. There were many interventions on SCCs such as Archbishop Berhaneyesus Demerew Souraphiel, CM, Archbishop of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia’s intervention on behalf of the AMECEA delegates. In an interview with John Allen Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna, Austria stated:

The key idea, which has been extremely present in this synod, is the Small Christian Community. Many, many bishops from around the world have spoken about the Small Christian Communities. We see the need, and we have the desire, not to lose communities but to increase their number. We’re forced to reduce the number of parish structures, with all their administration and expenses, but we want to favor a growing number of Small Christian Communities led by laity – laity who aren’t full-time, who aren’t bureaucrats, but volunteers. These are people living in the field, who do what laity in many parishes and other communities already do, which is to take responsibility for a large part of the life of the church, the vibrant aspects of community life. We want to implement more explicitly the great theme of Vatican II: the common priesthood of all the baptized, with the ministerial priesthood at its service, promoting the holiness of the people of God. Laity today – or, I would rather say, the baptized today – are fully capable of being true witnesses to faith in Christ in their daily lives, and therefore in the lives of Small Christian Communities...[In the future] five small parishes in the countryside will form

---

<sup>23</sup> Zacchaeus Okoth in Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, *Lent: Let Light Shine Out of Darkness... Kenya Lenten Campaign Training Manual for Small Christian Communities*, Nairobi: KCCB Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, 2012, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> See “Small Christian Communities as an Agent of New Evangelization,” by Joachim Omolo Ouko, AJ, *Voices of Justice for Peace Regional News*, email dated 16 October, 2012.

one greater parish. Their facilities, however, could be used to animate some of these Small Christian Communities.”<sup>25</sup>

## COMMENTARY ON SYNOD

The process and results of the synod clarified several important aspects of the praxis structures, and theology of SCCs throughout the world. First, the synod delegates emphasized the importance of the parish and its rich variety of ecclesial communities in the New Evangelization. One commentary said that the key to New Evangelization is parishes coming to life and offering new forms of spiritual nourishment, sustenance, formation and community. This includes parish-based evangelization, engaging the laity in the task of evangelization (through Baptism all Christians are called to be missionaries and evangelizers) and the spirit and practice of the missionary parish.

Second, the synod statements clearly affirm and encourage the importance of SCCs in the parish structure and ministry. Pastoral, parish-based SCCs are part of the “new face” of the parish and form the core of this SCCs Model of Church. The parish is a communion or network of SCCs within the “communion of communities” ecclesiology. The patterns vary from dioceses in the countries in the Global South where the numbers of parishes are growing and the pastoral, parish-based SCCs are central in the pastoral structure and ministry (examples are Eastern Africa, Philippines and Korea) to dioceses in the West where parishes are clustering together in pastoral units with SCCs participating in the pastoral structure and ministry (an example is Austria). It is hoped that this priority on parishes will focus on the strengthening and growth of parishes that are founded and structured on SCCs from the grassroots. We have a saying: “SCCs are the new way of being parish.”

In this model of a cluster of parishes/a network of pastoral units/a “greater parish” spread over the geographical area of a number of present parishes it is very important that:

- The local Catholics on the grassroots take ownership of this plan.
- Key lay people (elected lay leaders, catechists, lay ministers, SCCs leaders, etc.) participate in the leadership and decision-making along with the priests and religious.
- A “communion of communities” model is the operating force.

Part of celebrating the 2012-2013 Year of Faith and promoting the New Evangelization in Africa is to study and reflect on the documents of the Second Vatican Council and apply them to our contemporary African world in a new and fresh way. Rahner’s challenge of inculturation and contextualization rings true today:

The church must be inculturated throughout the world if it is to be a World Church...This, then, is the issue: either the church sees and recognizes these essential differences of other cultures for which she should become a World Church and with a Pauline

---

<sup>25</sup> John L. Allen Jr., “Interview with Cardinal Christoph Schönborn,” *National Catholic Reporter (NCR)* (25 October 2012) on the National Catholic Reporter Website retrieved on 28 October, 2012 <http://ncronline.org/node/37906>

boldness draws the necessary consequences from this recognition, or she remains a Western Church and so in the final analysis betrays the meaning of Vatican II.<sup>26</sup>

At a conference on “Paul VI and the Church in Africa” that took place at CUEA in Nairobi, Kenya on 1-2 August, 2012 Tanzanian Cardinal Polycarp Pengo, Archbishop of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania spoke on “Missionaries to Yourself: The Legacy of Vatican II and the Identity of the Church in Africa.” He presented Pope Paul VI’s two challenges of “missionaries to yourselves” and “inculturation” (“You may and you must have an African Christianity”). He said that one of the greatest responses of the Church in Africa to Pope Paul VI’s two challenges is the establishment and growth of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Eastern Africa as well as other regions in Africa.

Pengo’s key points on SCC members being missionaries to themselves:

- SCCs are centers of communion, evangelization and missionary outreach.
- SCCs are self-ministering and self-propagating.
- SCCs offer opportunities for formation and training.
- Leaders of the SCCs are lay people who participate in a new way of being church.

Pengo’s key points on SCC members promoting inculturation:

- The aim is to make the Catholic Church more “African” and close to the people.
- SCCs offer a sense of belonging where real relationships can be experienced.
- Christianity is lived in local communities in which everyday life and work take place.
- SCCs are the most concrete expression of the Church-as-Family Model of Church.<sup>27</sup>

Thus we are challenged to continue to develop SCCs as a contemporary African response to the pastoral and missionary vision of the Second Vatican Council.

### **III. The Praxis of SCCs in Eastern Africa Though the Lens of the Three Speakers at the Symposium**

At our Theological Symposium 2013 Retired English Bishop Colin Davies, MHM, formerly of Ngong Diocese, Kenya spoke on “Personal Insights of a Participant of the Second Vatican Council.” Along with retired Ugandan Archbishop James Odongo, formerly of Tororo Archdiocese, Uganda and retired Tanzanian Bishop Gervase Nkalanga, formerly of Bukoba Diocese, Tanzania, Davies is one of the three living bishops in the AMECEA Region who participated in the Second Vatican Council in Rome. On 11 October, 2012 Pope Benedict XVI presided at a Special Mass at St Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (1962-2012) of the Opening of the Second Vatican Council. Presently

---

<sup>26</sup> Karl Rahner, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," *Theological Studies*, 40, 4 (December, 1979), p. 718, 724.

<sup>27</sup> Summary of Polycarp Pengo, “Missionaries to Yourself: The Legacy of Vatican II and the Identity of the Church in Africa,” Conference on “Paul VI and the Church in Africa,” Nairobi: Kenya: Unpublished Paper, 1 August, 2012, pp. 4-5.

there are 70 living Catholic bishops worldwide who participated in the council. 14 of these bishops concelebrated with the pope that day. Bishop Davies was the only AMECEA Bishop.

In the past year I have been helping Bishop Davies on the new book that he is writing on *New Evangelization in Kenya: 1965 Onwards: Pastoral Initiatives*. One day we were working on the chapter on the Second Vatican Council. He showed me his fascinating personal pocket diaries of his time in Rome during the Third Session in 1964 and the Fourth Session in 1965. Yes, Bishop Davies was there!

As a priest and bishop in Kenya Bishop Davies has a unique position in spanning the period from 1952 when he was ordained a Mill Hill Missionary Priest to 2013. This covers pre-Vatican II, Vatican II, the whole history of AMECEA (1961-2013) and the founding and growth of Small Christian Communities as the key pastoral priority in Eastern Africa (1973 to 2013).

In his new book Davies stresses the importance of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa. In a wide ranging interview<sup>28</sup> he recalled how SCCs are the fruit of Vatican II ecclesiology. The discovery of Small Christian Communities in the AMECEA countries in the 1970s “was a marvelous novelty that has made the church grow.” He singled out the vibrant church at the SCC level as the greatest mark of ecclesiastical development on the African continent. Davies also participated in the First African Synod in Rome in 1994 and has witnessed how SCCs have developed as an inculturated model of church from the grassroots.

Kenyan lay theologian Mrs. Philomena Njeri Mwaura, an associate professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Kenyatta University and the Director of Centre for Gender Equity and Empowerment, spoke on “Gender Issues since Vatican II.” She referred many times to the importance of women in SCCs in Eastern Africa. She emphasized that women can be equal participants in this pastoral model of church. This confirms our research and Case Studies on SCCs. Some examples:

- General research indicates that 75% of the members of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Nairobi Archdiocese in Nairobi, Kenya are women.
- In interviews Catholic women (in Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Nairobi, Kenya and other places) have said: “In the hierarchical, clerical Catholic Church in Kenya we women feel at the bottom. This is reinforced by traditional African customs and traditions where women are second class. But in the SCCs we feel that we women are equals and have a voice.”<sup>29</sup>
- Often women take leaderships roles in the SCCs and are very active in

---

<sup>28</sup> Colin Davies in an interview with the author in Nairobi, Kenya, 24 March, 2012.

<sup>29</sup> “We Women Are Equals and Have a Voice,” Story No. 533 in the “African Stories Database”, African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved on 13 March, 2011, [http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-database.html?task=display2&cid\[0\]=615](http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-database.html?task=display2&cid[0]=615)

committees and SCCs activities. Research in Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan and Sudan indicates that women are better in peacemaking than men. Men tend to emphasize power and control while women emphasize personal relationships.

- Nigerian theologian Sister Anne Arabome, SSS points out that “the initiation and deepening of commitment to Small Christian Communities would be a natural place for women, together with men, to work out new collaborative styles of leadership, as suggested in No. 19 of the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Second African Synod. Studying the Word of God and sharing this word would provide a prayerful setting for this experience of collaboration.”<sup>30</sup> This is related to the challenge of the equality of women. A new vocabulary is emerging such as Gender Justice and Gender Equality.

Kenyan theologian Father Lawrence Njoroge, a diocesan priest of the Archdiocese of Nairobi and currently the Dean of Students at the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, spoke on “New Evangelisation in the Light of *Gaudium et Spes*.” He emphasized the importance of Small Christian Communities in the New Evangelization in Eastern Africa. My own experience and research confirms this importance.

On 3 March, 2011 I presented as a paper on “Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of the Growth and Impact of Small Christian Communities in the AMECEA Region as AMECEA Celebrates Its Golden Jubilee” at the 13th Interdisciplinary Theological Session on the theme “The Faculty of Theology of CUEA Celebrates the Golden Jubilee of AMECEA” at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) in Nairobi, Kenya. Many papers were presented at this conference covering the 50 years of AMECEA under three headings: Part I: “Deeper Evangelization. Part II: “Formation and Education.” Part III: “Church Life, Organization and Structures.” I specifically treated the topic of “Small Christian Communities” under Part III. Many bishops and pastoral leaders recommended the importance of a thorough ongoing evaluation<sup>31</sup> of SCCs to learn from the past and to help plan for the future.

This paper went through various drafts and revisions until it was published in different forms. At first there was no chapter on “SCCs’ Involvement in the New Evangelization in Africa.” Then I added a section of 11 pages in Chapter 5 on “The New Media and Small Christian Communities in the AMECEA Region” in the paperback book *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*, Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications – CUEA Press Double *Spearhead* Nos. 199-200 (2012). Now it has become a full independent chapter of 19 pages in the free online Ebook on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website at: [http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build\\_new.pdf](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build_new.pdf)

---

<sup>30</sup> Anne Arabome, “Women, You Are Set Free! Women and Discipleship in the Church” in Orobator, *Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*, p. 126.

<sup>31</sup> In many evaluations of AMECEA meetings and conferences it has been emphasized that the preparation stage gets an A rating, the meetings and conferences themselves get an A rating, but the implementation stage and follow-up get only a C rating. For SCC meetings and conferences this challenges us to include in the ongoing strategic plan accountability, timelines, benchmarks and financial support.

Some examples:

- A contemporary Case Study is the Evangelizers of the Word Ministry in Christ the Teacher Parish (Catholic Chaplaincy Centre) at Kenyatta University in Nairobi that is described as follows:

This is a group of university students dedicated to preaching the Word of God in and out of Kenyatta University. The members are students leading a mature sacramental life. They undergo formation in the monthly Formation Sessions of the Blessed John Paul II Parish Evangelizing Teams that meet at the Maryknoll Society House in Nairobi.

The members' main activity is sharing the Word of God in SCCs. Members are sent to the different Small Christian Communities to help interpret the readings of the day. The group is also involved in the animation of the mass in the university parish. The members organize community outreach programs to children's homes whereby they gather food and other forms of assistance to the homes, help in cleaning, cooking, playing with the children and sharing the Word of God with them. The members meet weekly on Sundays at 4 p.m.<sup>32</sup>

Through their SCCs and other apostolic programs these university students have a missionary spirit and practice. The "Reach In, Reach Out Program" means that you have to be evangelized first before you can evangelize others. The "Capture, Recapture Outreach Program" is a New Evangelization program to visit students in their residence halls/dorms at Kenyatta University who have stopped going to church and are not involved in SCCs.

- SCCs are participating in various pastoral events and outreach programs in Eastern Africa during the 2012-2013 Year of Faith. These include catechetical and religious education programs (involvement of SCCs in the ministry of catechizing specific groups – children, youth and adults); more Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection; focus on the family as the domestic church; increased celebration of the sacraments<sup>33</sup> such as Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation<sup>34</sup> and Matrimony; and promoting the use of the social media/new media<sup>35</sup> and social networking in the New Evangelization.

---

<sup>32</sup> Christ the Teacher Parish, Kenyatta University Website, retrieved on 11 October, 2011, <http://www.kucatholic.or.ke>

<sup>33</sup> As an example St. Austin's Parish Church in Nairobi Archdiocese celebrated its Centenary on Pentecost Sunday, 19 May, 2013. The nine SCCs in the parish and other small apostolic groups prepared a huge sacramental event with many couples getting married, 200 couples renewing their marriage vows, Catholic in marriages with spouses of other religious faiths returning to the Eucharist and many newly baptized adults getting confirmed.

<sup>34</sup> One creative example of inculturation in Africa is to emphasize the sacrament of Confirmation as a Christian "Rite of Passage" for African teenagers (13 to 16 years old) comparable to the traditional initiation rites in various ethnic groups. SCC members can accompany and support the candidates in their SCCs.

- In his 2012 Christmas Pastoral Letter entitled *We Hold a Treasure that is Jesus Christ Our Lord* Kenyan Cardinal John Njue, the Archbishop of Nairobi, urged that every baptized Catholic in Nairobi Archdiocese be an active member of a Small Christian Community in his or her neighborhood and an agent of evangelization. In the section on “The Way Forward” he recommends the following points to be on our parish pastoral agenda as we continue the celebration of the Year of Faith and the era of New Evangelization:

1. Formation of agents of evangelization on deepening the Catholic faith by studying and discussing together in small groups the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the documents of Vatican Council II. This includes developing a culture of sharing on matters of faith and assimilating the scriptures.
2. Strategy to make the Family Biblical Apostolate a reality to strengthen Small Christian Communities.
3. Strengthen and support the Catholic media apostolate and educate the youth to get involved in media evangelization.

In his talk Njoroje asked if the implementation of the AMECEA key pastoral priority of SCCs takes into consideration the new means of science and technology – specifically new radio and TV stations in Kenya and the appropriation of the social media/new media. In my online Ebook, Chapter 9 on “The Future is Now: Using the Internet to Promote SCCs in Africa and Around the World” states:

In the 52 year history of AMECEA we have always been challenged to respond to the contemporary signs of the times. Today we have the growing importance of social networking, the internet, cyberspace and the social media/new media... The social media/new media revolution is changing the way the world – and the Catholic Church – communicates.

This chapter documents how we are reinventing and renewing SCCs to respond to the contemporary signs of the times in Africa. Some examples:

- Small Christian Communities Facebook Pages and Groups<sup>36</sup>  
[www.facEbook.com/pages/Nairobi-Kenya/Small-Christian-Communities/289921983315](http://www.facEbook.com/pages/Nairobi-Kenya/Small-Christian-Communities/289921983315)

As of 22 June 2013: Of the first 837 fans (members or friends) on the SCCs Facebook Page, 65.6% are male and 34.4% are female. 70.4% are in the 18-44 year old age bracket. By country, the largest number of fans come from Kenya followed by United States, India,

---

<sup>35</sup> I use these two expressions interchangeably. It is interesting that the expression “new media” was used more in Vatican documents five years ago. But following common universal usage “social media” is now preferred.

<sup>36</sup> This is documented in Francis Njuguna, “Small Christian Communities Now Meet on Facebook,” *The Seed*, December, 2012 (Volume 24, No. 12, Issue 252), retrieved on 28 December, 2012 <http://www.consolatamissionarieskenya.co.ke/?p=468>



Germany, Tanzania, Nigeria, Uganda, South Africa, Poland and Philippines in that order. By city, the largest number of fans comes from Nairobi followed by Mombasa, Nakuru, Dar es Salaam, Kampala, Nyeri, Lagos and Eldoret in that order. People post a wide variety of comments on the Facebook Page: Request for prayers for people who are sick or who have died. Spiritual reflections. Bible reflections. Visits to, and activities of, particular SCCs. Requests for information on SCCs. Reminders of updates on the SCCs Website. The wall is particularly active during SCCs courses, workshops, meetings and retreats.

- The “Evangelizers of the Word” Ministry created a Facebook Page to reach out to youth.  
([http://www.facebook.com/group.php?v=app\\_2373072738&gid=328247078038#!/group.php?v=wall&gid=328247078038](http://www.facebook.com/group.php?v=app_2373072738&gid=328247078038#!/group.php?v=wall&gid=328247078038))

The Profile Picture of this page is an imaginary painting of Jesus Christ sitting in a garden and using a computer with the word “Facebook” on the cover. The description of the page reads: *1 Corinthians* 9:16: "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel." The African young men and women who are fans (members or friends) of this page do online faith sharing, exchange spiritual reflections and learn on how to evangelize through the media.

- SCCs can use YouTube to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ? Youth in Eastern Africa love music and drama. Youth Choirs are popular everywhere. Through YouTube audio and video clips of choir music like Christian music videos especially with *Bible* and mission-minded themes can be posted on SCC Websites and available through Smart Phones. Information and awareness-building videos on ecology/environment and justice and peace themes are popular too. Various SCCs DVDs, video clips and training materials are posted on [YouTube](#) and available through many social networking sites and web applications.<sup>37</sup>

- St. Isidore of Seville International Online Skype SCC uses Video Conferencing to communicate together. Our permanent group has ten members from the following countries: England, Ethiopia, Germany, Kenya, Tanzania and USA. We met every Tuesday following this timetable: 9 a.m. in Texas, USA; 10 a.m. in New Jersey, USA; 3 p.m. in England; 4 p.m. in Germany and 5 p.m. in Kenya and Tanzania. We read the Gospel of the following Sunday following the “Steps in the Weekly Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection/Bible—Life Connections Service of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa.” A key part is connecting the Gospel passage to our everyday life and having a “take away” (practical follow-up) that we share at the end of our weekly meeting.

Concerning radio and TV in Kenya, the Catholic Church has increased the number of Catholic FM Stations at the diocesan level and is doing a feasibility study on starting a national Catholic TV Station. Many of these radio stations have regular

---

<sup>37</sup> Every weekend on local TV in metro Manila, Filipino Cardinal Chito Tagle, the Archbishop of Manila, Philippines hosts *The Word Exposed*, a half-hour TV commentary covering each of the Sunday readings in anticipation of the weekend's liturgy. It is also available online on Facebook (where he has over 100,000 fans) and YouTube.



programs on SCCs in different languages. Some are interactive “talk shows” that encourage listener participation from SCCs members.

A final comment about this “Theological Symposium 2013.” Following the rotation plan in the Tangaza University College School of Theology, this year’s event was organized by the Pastoral Theology Department. Over the last five years this department has been strengthened with some of its regular courses made into core courses and new electives added. For example, “Small Christian Communities as a New Model of Church in Africa Today (PTC418)” is now a two credit core course, three hours a week, lecture format, pastorally oriented. It is presently offered annually in the Second Semester of the Academic Year (January to April as part of the STB and BATH (CUEA) Degrees (Eighth Semester) and the MA Degree in Pastoral Ministry.

Over the years I have had many interesting conversations with Tanzanian theologian Father Laurenti Magesa on the curriculum in theological institutes and seminaries in Africa. In an interview on 17 May, 2011 he emphasized that if SCCs have been a key pastoral priority (not just an option) in the AMECEA Region since 1976 they should have more prominence in the curriculum such as being a core or required course. This happened at Tangaza University College starting in 2011. Theological institutes and seminaries in Africa are now leading the world in offering a variety of courses, modules, workshops and practica on SCCs.

#### **IV. Conclusion: Towards the Future of SCCs in the World Church**

A final thought about the possible future influence of Small Christian Communities on our World Church. As mentioned earlier SCCs are not specifically mentioned in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, but are clearly implied. SCCs are not specifically mentioned in the 1983 revised *Code of Canon Law*, but are indirectly referred to in the section on “Structures” under the “People of God.” The Particular Churches (Local Churches)<sup>38</sup> have the freedom to carry out pastoral work in parishes on the local level following their own structures and activities. This is described as the ordering of the parish on the most local levels. Key texts are Canons 204, 211, 225, 515 and 518. Tanzanian canon lawyer Father Augustine Mringi (who died in 2001) states:

By directing that the traditional parish should be composed of Small Christian Communities the AMECEA Bishops in 1979 are simply saying that Canon Law should not continue to take the traditional parish as the basic juridical unit of the Church, because it has now become an association of the communities of the Christian faithful and is no longer a “a community of Christian faithful” in the primary sense of community. The parish priest is

---

<sup>38</sup> Some of the language of the documents of Vatican II has to be revised and updated following the principles of subsidiarity, inculturation and contextualization. Bishops Davies points out that the expression “Local Church” is better understood in our local, Eastern African context. Expressions such as “Particular Church” seem distant and juridical and may be more suited for the Eastern Churches and Orthodox Churches. Equally “Local African Church” fits better than the expression “Autochthonous (meaning indigenous or native) Church.”

now a coordinator and animator of a community of internally self-governing communities.

The Small Christian Communities in the parish are now in reality the actual centers of pastoral work, from which all basic ecclesial activities commence and receive their validity and strength. On this account, the Small Christian Community has *de facto* become a “juridic person” because it is internally autonomous in the sense that it elects its own leaders, raises its own funds for self-support and promotes its own evangelization and catechesis. Thus the *Code of Canon Law* is challenged to recognize this *fait accompli* and formally include Small Christian Communities in the structures of the church.<sup>39</sup>

English diocesan priest Father Gerry Proctor states that while there is no explicit mention of SCCs in the code, “those of us involved in developing this level of being church can find a number of significant references which will give some solidity and juridical basis to all we are doing.”<sup>40</sup> He goes on to explain:

“The code appears to encourage a different model of church, where each Catholic is aware of their ‘right’ and recognizes their ‘duty’ to become active members at their local level bringing the message of salvation to every person without exception. It is the BEC process that most appears to be enabling the local church to realize this new model envisaged by the code...There is a rich seam of pastoral theology underpinned by the code that has been little explored to date.”<sup>41</sup>

Hopefully a future revision of the *Code of Canon Law* will specifically mention SCCs. We in Eastern Africa feel that our model of pastoral, parish-based SCCs from below is a new pastoral structure within a communion of communities ecclesiology. A network of SCCs on the grassroots is a new way of being parish. Already some changes are happening. Years ago the diocesan statistical reports sent yearly to the Vatican did not include the number of SCCs and the lay ministries coming from SCCs. Now the reports cover this growing part of church life. Today there are over 120,000 Small Christian Communities in the nine AMECEA countries in Eastern Africa. Kenya alone has over 45,000 SCCs. In part these numbers are calculated from the many dioceses and parishes in Eastern Africa’s detailed statistics on the names, numbers and activities of SCCs that are sent annually to the Vatican. These statistics are also used as part of the bishop’s every five-year report during his *Ad Limina* visit.

In light of the topic of this paper there is a very challenging article called “Analyzing the Present Moment: Latin American BECs in 2004” compiled by Proctor on behalf of the

---

<sup>39</sup> Augustine Mringi, “Small Christian Communities and Canon Law,” in *Communio at the Grassroots: Small Christian Communities*, Bangalore: Indian Institute of Spirituality, 1995, pp. 326-327.

<sup>40</sup> Gerry Proctor, “BECs/SCCs Both Spirit and Law,” *Buena Vista Ink*, 18:5 (Sept/Oct 2004) and 18:6 (Nov/Dec 2004).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

José Marins Team. After nine years its critique and insights are still very relevant to the future of the World Church:

The Second Vatican Council gave the church an extraordinary breath of fresh theological and ecclesiological life, but failed completely to create the new structures necessary to maintain this development... This trend was particularly noticeable in the absence since 1985 of any reference in magisterial statements to church as the People of God. There had been a greater stress on hierarchy, an increase in clericalism, an undermining of the collegiality of bishops... It was a curious moment when the [Latin American] BECs felt themselves to be the ones who were faithful to the council, obedient to the Magisterium, and defending the re-structuring of the Latin American Church achieved at Medellin (1968), Puebla (1979) and Santo Domingo (1992). It is possible that this was the only church to respond to Vatican II by creating new structures corresponding to the new theology. Their ecclesial intuition has been under attack ever since, and yet the BECs continue to be the major source of renewal in the church at the grassroots level. This expression of church at the base is a genuine experience of communion and participation.<sup>42</sup>

In a recent message Proctor states:

One of the things little written about in English is the reflection on the BECs being a structure of Church particularly in way they are described by CELAM in their major documents as noted in the article I wrote. However that structure was actually put into canon law in a number of dioceses by the creation of diocesan laws/regulations (sometimes after Diocesan Synods)<sup>43</sup> which incorporated the pastoral option of the diocese into a fully legitimate recognition by the Local Church of the agreed theological/pastoral position of the continental church as expressed by the episcopal conferences. This happened in Mexico and the Dominican Republic, for example. I met bishops/priests/BEC leaders in those dioceses, but little was known and even less written down about these choices because of the desire not to bring them to the attention of the Vatican because of the fear of renewed persecution.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Gerry Proctor in Joseph Healey and Jeanne Hinton (eds.), *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005 and Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006, pp. 32-33.

<sup>43</sup> This has happened in Africa as well as seen in these three examples. Blomfontein Archdiocese in South Africa has gone a step further in its pastoral planning and coordination that emphasizes SCCs by establishing this guideline: "If the pastor in a parish with active SCCs is transferred, there is an archdiocesan policy that his successor should also be committed to SCCs." The booklet on the Synod of Mwanza Archdiocese in Tanzania in 2002 contains 105 references to *Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo za Kikristo* (JNNK), the Swahili expression for SCCs. The *Pastoral Guidelines for the Archdiocese of Nairobi 2013* state: "All Christian faithful in the Archdiocese of Nairobi should be members of SCCs."

<sup>44</sup> Gerry Proctor in an email message to the author, 17 June, 2013.

Reflecting on SCCs as a pastoral structure in the Catholic Church the following anecdote from the Introduction to the “International Section” of *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment* is significant:

In January, 1986 Joe Healey participated in the South African Missiological Conference in Pretoria, South Africa. The keynote speaker of the congress was Hans Kung. Joe gave a lecture on "Basic Christian Communities: Church-Centered or World-Centered?" mainly from the pastoral experience of SCCs in Eastern Africa. After his talk he received a message that Hans Kung wanted to see him at the next coffee break. Kung explained that in his latest research he had been studying different paradigms of the church: house churches in the First Century, monasteries in medieval times, the parish in recent centuries. He wondered if the parish model was no longer appropriate in different places in the world, and if the model or paradigm of the future is the Small Christian Community (SCC)? Joe has often wondered if this was prophetic. Prophetic in the sense that Yves Congar’s quote in the “Foreword” by Cardinal Murphy-O’Connor is prophetic [related to “renewal in the church has come about, time and time again in its history, in and through the inspiration of small communities – monastic, evangelical, missionary, lay communities, communities of women – fired by the Holy Spirit”].<sup>45</sup>

What is the new structure or model or paradigm? Clearly SCCs are a significant part of a new way of being parish from below. Polish theologian Father Christopher Cieslikiewicz, OFM Conv documents an interesting Case Study of the Eastern African SCC model in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. A key turning point for the growth of SCCs in Tanzania was promoting a model of church from the bottom up. “The implementation of the new *Constitution of the National Lay Council* in 1998 required that the election of lay leaders in parishes throughout Tanzania starts at the level of SCCs and move upwards. This insured that the Parish Council and Parish Pastoral Council<sup>46</sup> leaders would be chosen from those who were already leaders in their SCCs – thus true representation from below.<sup>47</sup> Such decisions gave full confidence to the faithful and opened new possibilities for the laity in the local church.”<sup>48</sup>

Many Catholics (and others) around the world including SCC leaders are very

---

<sup>45</sup> Healey and Hinton, *Small Christian Communities Today*, p. 155.

<sup>46</sup> Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) is a popular term used to emphasize that the council should have a pastoral focus. See the *1983 Code of Canon Law*, No. 536: “A pastoral council is to be established in each parish, over which the pastor presides and in which the Christian faithful, together with those who share in pastoral care by virtue of their office in the parish, assist in fostering pastoral activity.” This council can have commissions on faith formation, finance, liturgy, etc. More and more these PPCs in Eastern Africa include representatives of SCCs.

<sup>47</sup> American theologian Marianist Father Bernard Lee, SM feels that this is one of the most significant pastoral and theological advances of the Eastern African SCCs.

<sup>48</sup> Christopher Cieslikiewicz, “Pastoral Involvement of Parish-based SCCs in Dar es Salaam,” in Healey and Hinton, *Small Christian Communities Today*, pp. 99-105.

hopeful in the changes being introduced by Pope Francis. He is using the expression “People of God” in his talks and is emphasizing more collegiality, collaboration, consultation and subsidiarity. We are optimistic that the experience of SCCs as a New Model of Church from below as witnessed by SCC members in Latin America, Africa and Asia will bring significant changes in new pastoral structures corresponding to our contemporary communion ecclesiology and the ecclesial reality on the local level.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> As we move into the future we continue to *create the path by walking*, a famous Spanish proverb used to describe the process and dynamic of SCCs around the world.

## Bibliography

- AMECEA Plenary: The Implementation of the AMECEA Bishops' Pastoral Priority of Building Small Christian Communities: An Evaluation, African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, Vol. 21, No. 5. Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications, 1979.
- Baur, John, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African Church History*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, First Edition, 1994, Second Edition, 2009.
- Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africa's Commitment (Africae Munus)*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2011.  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20111119\\_africaemunus\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20111119_africaemunus_en.html)  
<http://www.zenit.org/article33862?l=english>
- Davies, Colon, *New Evangelization in Kenya: 1965 Onwards: Pastoral Initiatives*, Nairobi: Unpublished Manuscript, 2013.
- Flannery, Austin (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Bombay: St. Pauls, 1975.
- Flynn, Kieran, *Communities for the Kingdom: A Handbook for Small Christian Community Leaders*, Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications, *Spearhead* Nos. 181-182, 2007.
- Healey, Joseph, *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*, Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications – CUEA Press *Double Spearhead* Nos. 199-200 (2012). The updated version as of 24 June, 2013 is available as a free online Ebook on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website at:  
[http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build\\_new.pdf](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build_new.pdf)
- Healey, Joseph, Final Annotated Syllabus of Two Credit Core Course “Small Christian Communities as a New Model of Church in Africa Today (PTC418),” Tangaza University College, Nairobi, Kenya, Nairobi: Privately Printed, 2013  
<http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/africa/kenya/223-january-to-march-2013-scc-course-syllabus-at-tangaza-university-college.html>

- 
- Healey, Joseph and Jeanne Hinton (eds.), *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005 and Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006. Available as an Ebook on Amazon (for Kindle), Google and Barnes and Noble (for Nook).
- Jassy, Marie-France Perrin, *Basic Communities in the African Churches*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973.
- Jassy, Marie-France Perrin, *Forming Christian Communities*, Kampala: *Gaba Pastoral Paper* No. 12, 1970.
- John Paul II, Post-Synod Apostolic Exhortation, *The Church in Africa (Ecclesia in Africa)*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995
- 1983 Code of Canon Law*, Canon Law Society of America Washington, DC, 1983.
- Orobator, Agbonkhianmeghe E. (ed.), *Reconciliation, Justice and Peace – the Second African Synod*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011 and Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2011. French Edition to be co-published by Khartala and CERAP.
- Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website and “Facebook Page”  
[www.smallchristiancommunities.org](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org)

Father Joseph G. Healey, MM is an American Maryknoll missionary priest who lives in Nairobi, Kenya. Presently he teaches a full semester core course on "Small Christian Communities (SCCs) as a New Model of Church in Africa Today" at Tangaza University College (CUEA) and a SCCs Seminar on “Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa Today” at Hekima College (CUEA) in Nairobi. He facilitates SCC Workshops and animates SCCs in Eastern Africa. He is an ordinary member of the St. Kizito Small Christian Community in the Waruku Section of St. Austin’s Parish in Nairobi Archdiocese. He co-edited *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment* (Orbis Books and Paulines Publications Africa) and is the Moderator of the [Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org) ([www.smallchristiancommunities.org](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org)). His most recent book is *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*, Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications – CUEA Press Double *Spearhead* Nos. 199-200 (2012). The book is updated every month and is available as a free electronic Ebook on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website at: [http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build\\_new.pdf](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build_new.pdf)

Rev. Joseph G. Healey, MM  
 Maryknoll Society  
 P.O. Box 43058  
 00100 Nairobi, Kenya  
 Safaricom: 0713-028519 (Kenya)  
 Telkom Orange Wireless: 057-2522977 (Kenya)  
 Blackberry: 973-216-4997 (USA)  
 Email: [JGHealey@aol.com](mailto:JGHealey@aol.com)

---

Updated as of: 22 June, 2013

**NOTE:** This article will be published in the 2013/2 issue of the *Tangaza Journal of Theology and Mission*, a biannual journal of the Tangaza University College in Nairobi, Kenya.