

A Case for SCCs as a Pastoral Priority in Ghana

Presently, Small Christian Community (SCC) is a term that is well-known in Ghana but only in theory strictly speaking. Almost every parish has Small Christian Communities, but they are practically no different from the other traditional societies or groups that one would normally find in a parish set up. In other words SCC is not a pastoral priority in Ghana right now.

After taking a course on Small Christian Communities in Nairobi, Kenya, and fortified by a pastoral experience of Small Christian Communities in Tanzania -- Holy Spirit Parish, Segerea, Dar es Salaam -- I think it is high time that the church in Ghana considers making SCCs her pastoral priority. This is the focus of this reflection paper.

To begin with, the church is essentially a community flowing from her head, Christ, who belongs to the first Small Community that is, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Besides Jesus belonged to the first Small Christian Community, that is, with Joseph and Mary his parents. Without taking anything away from the importance of the larger Christian community as such, it goes without saying that we are meant to be in Small Christian Communities. The church woke up to this reality when at the First African Synod, the church was referred to as the Family of God and the family as the domestic church. Families are like the numerous blocks that go into the building of any structure. Since a SCC is a group of families, one does not need a stretch of the imagination to realize that this is only a step short of saying that SCCs are the basic building blocks of our church.

Moreover, with regards to our Lord's teaching that "where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst" (*Matthew* 18:20), one cannot help but argue that SCCs are communities of faith gathered together by the Lord Jesus Christ himself in which he is present in a new way.

The above indicates that SCCs, the church on the move, is by definition, at the heart of the church's nature. However, I want also to show that there is a lot more than this to make a case for SCC being a pastoral priority.

To begin with, it is not an exaggeration for one to say that our churches are only little short of "anonymous crowds" where the majority of Christians get lost and lonely. They come to church and go back home without knowing one another significantly. This is where the untold significance of SCC comes in. SCCs that are constituted by a few families help the Christians to have more interaction and thereby know one another better. This is undoubtedly more advantageous to both the pastoral agents and the Christian community.

Apart from bringing the lay faithful together, SCCs are undoubtedly avenues for growth in the appreciation and deepening sense of the Word of God. My interaction with some members of St. Josephine Bakhita SCC of the aforementioned parish indicates that some people actually get to read the *Bible* by themselves for the first time in SCC meetings. Many Catholics are simply not used to personal reading of the *Bible*. If SCCs are the means of getting them to do this then it is laudable and should be welcomed everywhere. Besides it is also at SCCs meetings that the lay faithful help one another to find answers to some of the disturbing questions they harbor. For instance it is not unusual to find SCCs members

discussing the question as to whether the Blessed Mother had any other children after our Lord!

Moreover some SCCs are so well organized that they carry out teaching the catechism to children in their localities. This is not only a fundamental responsibility that is met in the SCCs, but also a contributing element to the new evangelization.

Furthermore, the more members of SCCs actively participate in the various activities of the group, the more they realize our Lord's command to serve one another. Community outreach programs such as clean-up campaigns, health services through their trained servants of the sick, justice and peace awareness and anti-tribalism advocacy among others are usually organized and carried out through the SCCs.

Finally the upsurge of family and marriage breakdowns has made the need for marriage preparation and guidance apparent. SCCs, far more than others, are sources of marriage animators who advise the would-be couples and couples with marital difficulties.

Thus to the SCC members the community is the beacon of hope. It helps them live a more communitarian lives; offers them opportunities to reach out to others and be reached out to more effectively; share their faith experiences; and learn more about their faith more than they would do on individual basis. To top it all, it is the new and wonderful way of being Christian, of being church.

On the other hand, the pastoral agents such as the priests and catechists, through the SCCs, gets to know the real pastoral needs of his parishioners. It helps to solve organizational problems as far as pastoral planning is concerned. SCCs foster significant interaction between pastoral agents and the pastured.

My experience in Segerea Parish, Dar es Salaam also tells me that SCCs are the means of helping many lay faithful to "own" their church. The home visitations to various SCCs that I made with the parish priest gave me the impression that many Christians would commit themselves to carrying out church activities precisely because their priests visits them in their homes. They see commitment not only in their priests but also in their fellow lay faithful who gather from time to time in their homes. This becomes a challenge to them to also contribute their quota to the community.

The Ghanaian situation, if compared to the East African counterparts, indicates that we are missing something essential. Whereas the SCCs help the East African pastoral agents to take the sacraments to people, we in Ghana wait for the people to come to church to get them. I think that by reading the signs of the time it is certainly the case that the church must go to the people if she wishes to have them come to her. SCCs offer a ready means. In this we see SCCs becoming effective tools for the new evangelization that our church is in need of.

From all the above, it is quite clear that it is not out of lack of understanding of the situation of the church in Ghana that prompted my reflection and proposal that SCCs be considered as a pastoral priority in Ghana. My reflection is based on the very nature of the church and the day to day realities of the church in Ghana that have engulfed us. I think SCCs would be a boost to Ghanaian Church's efforts in meeting most of the pastoral challenges of her members.

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