

Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Promote Family and Marriage Ministry in Eastern Africa

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ABSTRACT:

The nine AMECEA Countries participated in the III Extraordinary World Synod of Bishops on "The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization" in Rome from 5-19 October, 2014. In Eastern Africa Small Christian Communities (SCCs) were part of the consultation process and answered 11 of the 39 questions in the poll. Research on the 180,000 SCCs in Eastern Africa reveals that SCCs elect lay ministers/animators/coordinators for specific groups such as couples (married and engaged), youth and children and for specific pastoral ministries such as Catechesis, Justice and Peace, Religious Education, Sacraments and Spiritual/Religious Formation. A SCC is a communion of families. The SCC is an important support group for families and promotes a family culture. The SCC is both a place and a path for the pastoral care and evangelization of families and marriages. This praxis of SCCs in Africa is contributing to the development of the theology of the Church as Family of God.

Now SCCs in the AMECEA Region are preparing for the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the "The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary¹ World" to take place in Rome from 4-25 October, 2015. The meeting will "seek working guidelines in the pastoral care of the person and the family." We are challenged to continue to explore how SCC members and others can accompany families and couples who are wounded. This is the Ministry of Compassionate Accompaniment. This is part of the imperative for all Catholics to go to the margins of society to serve the poor, migrants and those without hope. Pope Francis also emphasizes the importance of welcoming, listening to and accompanying young people today.

After the October, 2015 Synod of Bishops itself there will be an ongoing process involving collegiality and subsidiarity. There will be follow-up meetings and various commissions related to pastoral solutions to the challenges of family and marriage. Ongoing discussion and decision-making will take place on the local level through national episcopal conferences. Pope Francis is expected to issue a *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation* with an ongoing plan of action that includes concrete pastoral solutions. SCCs help to promote this family and marriage ministry.

¹ The English word "contemporary" has a more up-to-date, "here and now" meaning than the word "modern." In Swahili see the difference between *kileo* and *kisasa*.

1. Introduction: Two World Synods of Bishops on Family and Marriage (2014-2015)

The nine AMECEA Countries participated in the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on "The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization," in Rome from 5-19 October, 2014. This synod "defined" the "*status quaestionis*" (Latin for "the state of the question") of the topics of family and marriage.² Then the next synod – officially called the Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the "The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary³ World"-- will take place in Rome from 4-25 October, 2015 and will "seek working guidelines in the pastoral care of the person and the family."

The total number of participants in the October, 2014 Extraordinary General Assembly was 253 made up of representatives from the five continents divided as follows: 114 presidents of Episcopal Conferences (including seven from the AMECEA Region), 13 heads of the "sui iuris" Eastern Catholic Churches, 25 heads of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia, 9 members of the Ordinary Council of the Secretariat, the secretary general, the under-secretary, 3 nominees from the Union of Superior Generals, and 26 pontifical nominees. Other participants included 8 fraternal delegates, 38 auditors, including 13 married couples, and 16 experts. There were 25 women. The participants included one married couple from the AMECEA Region: Dr. Jean Dieudonné Gatsinga and Emerthe Gatsinga Tumuhayimpundu who are responsible for young families in the Focolare Movement for Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya and Uganda and who live in Rwanda. The married couple from South Africa were Stephen and Sandra Conway, regional heads for Africa of Retrouvaille.⁴

² Appendix 22 lists 78 proverbs on this theme of "family and marriage." Six of these proverbs are used in the July to September, 2014 Poll on the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website (<http://www.afriprov.org>): "My favorite proverb of the month on "family and marriage" is..." The top voter getters are: *The hoes of two people cultivating together in a field sometimes clash (hit) against each other.* Sukuma (Tanzania) Proverb. *Like ants, eat little and carry the rest back to your home.* Bembe (DRC, Tanzania) Proverb. The *2016 African Proverbs Calendar* has the theme "Family, Marriage and Relationships."

³ The English word "contemporary" has a more up-to-date, "here and now" meaning than the word "modern." In Swahili see the difference between *kileo* and *kisasa*.

⁴ A program to help couples to heal and renew their marriages. Thousands of couples who are heading for cold, unloving relationships or divorce have successfully overcome their marriage problems by attending the program. The Retrouvaille Program consists of a weekend experience combined with a series of 6-12 post-weekend sessions over three months. It provides the tools to help put one's marriage in order again and to rediscover a loving marriage relationship. The main emphasis of the program is on communication in marriage between husband and wife. It gives couples the opportunity to rediscover each other and examine their lives together in a new and positive way.

Eight themes served as guidelines for the discussions at the Extraordinary Synod taken from the *Preparatory Document (Lineamenta)*. A bishop opened each session with an explanation of the theme (topic) of the day. Then a married couple gave their witness on the theme being discussed. The final synthesis called the *Final Report of the Synod (Relatio Synodi)* is being used as the *Lineamenta (Guidelines)* for the Ordinary Synod in October, 2015. These two meetings are closely connected to the Eighth World Meeting of Families on the theme “Love is Our Mission: The Family Fully Alive” to take place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA from 22-27 September, 2015.

This important meeting will involve all the People of God – bishops, priests, consecrated men and women, and lay faithful of the Particular Churches of the entire world – all of whom are actively participating in preparations for the meeting through practical suggestions and the crucial support of prayer. Such support [and input] on your part, dear families, is especially significant and more necessary than ever ... May we all, then, pray together so that through these events the Church will undertake a true journey of discernment and adopt the necessary pastoral means to help families face their present challenges with the light and strength that comes from the Gospel.⁵

The Vatican asked national bishops' conferences around the world to conduct a wide-ranging survey of Catholics asking for their opinions on church teachings on family,⁶ marriage, annulments, single-parent families, adoptions, birth control, artificial contraception, abortion, surrogate motherhood (wombs for hire), premarital cohabitation, the culture of non-commitment and the presumption that the marriage bond can be temporary, conditional marriages, common law marriage, mixed or inter-religious marriage, same-sex marriage/unions and divorce.

⁵ “Pope Francis Writes to Families Asking for Their Prayers Ahead of October Synod,” 26 February 2014, *Tablet Website*, retrieved on 1 March, 2014, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/texts-speeches-homilies/4/296/pope-francis-writes-to-families-asking-for-their-prayers-ahead-of-october-synod>

The importance of prayer is seen in the joint statement from the Episcopal Conference of Benin and of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM/SCEAM), that concluded by inviting "all Christians, in the joy of the Gospel, to pray, to reflect and to act with the Church on the challenges of today's family," *International Fides News Service*, 18 June, 2014, Email message dated 18 June, 2014.

⁶ A request on our African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Facebook Page states: “Please contribute an African Proverb or Saying on ‘family’ and ‘marriage’ for our meeting on Saturday, 23 November, 2013. If possible mention the country and language.” There were 78 responses as of 24 June, 2014. A selection of these examples and others are listed in Appendix No. 22 in Joseph Healey, *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*, that is available as a free Ebook on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website, retrieved on 16 July, 2014, http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build_new.pdf Some of these proverbs are classified into the three categories mentioned later in this chapter.

This survey included the Africa-related challenges especially connected to these 73 African family and marriages issues⁷ (listed alphabetically):

abandoned babies,
 abortion,
 abusive and violent husbands due to strong temperament, alcohol and drugs,
 AIDs orphans,
 alcohol and dependency,
 alcoholic family,
 artificial methods of family planning,
 child abuse,
 child-headed families,
 cohabitation (“come we stay”),
 communicating the faith to the next generation,
 couples living together before marriage to test female fertility,
 customary marriage,⁸
 displacement of people,
 divorce (including on the grounds of a woman being unable to have children and couples who subsequently remarry),
 domestic violence/violence in the family,
 dowry or bridewealth – sometimes understood as the purchase price of the woman,⁹
 drug abuse,
 dysfunctional family,
 early, child and forced marriage (including child mothers),
 Ebola orphans,
 economic injustice,
 economic migration (internal and external),
 economic pressures/financial pressures occasioned by work and certain cultural traditions,

⁷ While many of these issues are universal, the African context and situation makes them African issues. There is some repetition because these issues are known by different names.

The importance of these 73 issues was confirmed by the grassroots reports of the delegates from Eastern Africa at the “AMECEA Pastoral Department Workshop for National Commissions for Marriage and Family Life Apostolate in the AMECEA Region” that took place in Nairobi from 23-27 June, 2014 and other meetings.

⁸ In the African context this is sometimes called traditional marriage. This is a cultural marriage following the customs and traditions of the local African ethnic groups. “Traditional” has many meanings. Worldwide it can refer to the marriage union between a man and a woman.

⁹ At the AMECEA Workshop in Nairobi in June, 2014 (see above) the many different traditions and practices of dowry or bridewealth among the nine Eastern African countries were compared and contrasted as well as the many different traditions and practices of dowry or bridewealth among the ethnic groups within a particular country. See examples in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

enslavement and frequent abandonment of women,
 ethnic animosity and tribal discrimination,
 domination of one marriage partner over the other,
 families with lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender members,
 Female Genital Mutilation (FGM),¹⁰
 gender-based violence,
 gender inequality,
 generation gap (inter-generational conflicts between parents and children),
 globalization,
 hectic, fast and exhausting pace of work,
 HIV/AIDS including discordant couples,
 homosexual unions and gay marriage,
 human trafficking,
 ignorance,
 impact of poverty on family life,
 inequality between genders,
 infertility,
 infidelity of couples/sexual promiscuity,
 insecurity,
 interfaith marriage issues,
 lack of mutual trust and intimacy,
 levirate marriage (widow inheritance),
 material poverty,
 migration,
 misconception of human rights linked to reproductive health,
 mixed marriages (including inter-faith or interreligious marriages)
 need to travel greater distances to work,
 negative mass media and social media portrait of marriage,
 no boy/son,
 non-commitment of spouses,
 patriarchy in African society,
 philosophy of relativism,
 polygamy,¹¹

¹⁰ Female genital mutilation (FGM), also known as “female genital cutting” and “female circumcision,” is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as “all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.” Laurenti Magesa feels the word “mutilation” is unfortunate and emphasized by Western specialists from the outside. He comments that an African mother would never consider this cultural ceremony as a “mutilation” of her daughter. Conversation with the author in Nairobi, 19 June, 2014.

¹¹ During the AMECEA Workshop in June, 2014 (see above) Ethiopian layman Aman Desalegn posed this pastoral question: In Ethiopia there is a new Prefecture called Robe. More than 80% of the population are Muslim. Some Muslim men want to join the Catholic Church with their three or four wives. In the light of present Catholic teaching on marriage, what is the pastoral solution to accommodate these Muslim families?

poverty,
 property grabbing after death of spouse,
 reformulation of the very concept of family,
 refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs),
 rituals after death,
 same sex unions/homosexual unions and gay marriage,
 sexual dysfunctions,
 single parents (single mothers and single fathers),¹²
 street children and street youth,
 Sugar Daddies/Sugar Mommies,
 tensions with Muslims (related to interreligious dialog),
 terrorism,
 urbanization,
 use of contraceptives,
 violence,
 war,
 witchcraft and superstition,
 youth unemployment.

This survey was part of the 39 questions in the eight-page *Preparatory Document* (*Lineamenta*) to the synod that is also available online. It has been translated into Amharic, Bemba, Chewa, Ganda, Swahili, Tumbuka and other languages in Eastern Africa.

Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, secretary general of the Vatican's Synod of Bishops, asked the conferences to distribute the poll "immediately as widely as possible to deaneries and parishes so that input from local sources can be received."¹³ This represents a significant shift in thinking in the Vatican. Bishop Marcello Semeraro of Albano Diocese, Italy and secretary of the Council of Cardinals, "dismissed criticism of the decision to circulate a public questionnaire ahead of October's Synod of Bishops on the family. 'The beauty of this moment is that the church feels encouraged to ask questions,' he said. 'The church doesn't just have answers; it also needs to ask questions.'"¹⁴

¹² While we often refer to the reality of single mothers in Africa, the number of single fathers is increasing.

¹³ Lorenzo Baldisseri in Joshua McElwee, "Vatican Asks for Parish-level Input on Synod Document," *National Catholic Reporter (NCR)*, 31 October, 2013, National Catholic Reporter Website, retrieved 4 November, 2013, <http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/vatican-asks-parish-level-input-synod-document>

¹⁴ Marcello Semeraro quoted in John Allan, "'Francis Revolution' Rolls On in Both Symbols and Substance," National Catholic Reporter Website, retrieved on 30 January, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/francis-revolution-rolls-both-symbols-and-substance>

Another shift of thinking is in the process or method of the synod. Pope Francis has indicated that the synods will be more collegial and more participatory. This will promote affective and effective communion that is a constitutive part of the collegial government of Synod of Bishops. This means practicing “effective collegiality” by granting bishops participation in the central government of the Church. Hungarian Jesuit Canon Lawyer Father Ladislav Orsy, SJ stated: “It is reasonable to anticipate that soon, in October this year, we shall be watching a synod operating on a new pattern.”¹⁵

Part of this new pattern is for bishops, priests, brothers, and sisters to become more of a “Listening Church.” Traditionally bishops are officially part of the “Teaching Church.” But regarding the topics of family and marriage they need to become part of the “Listening Church.” – to listen to the lived experience of lay people, husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, even youth and children. Nigerian theologian Father Elochukwu Uzukwu’s describes insightfully how church leaders need to become more of a “Listening Church.”¹⁶ It can be rightly asked: How much do Catholic Church leaders in Africa know about (alphabetically): families that have

¹⁵ Orsy writes further: “From our historical vantage point, we know that John Paul II and Benedict XVI chose (without saying it explicitly) to govern monarchically. Their policy consisted of calling on the bishops for advice, in the spirit of “affective collegiality”, but they never invited them to practice “effective collegiality” by granting them participation in the central government of the Church. Enter Francis. In his 1 April, 2014 letter, which is really an internal communication made public, he described bishops as his collaborators exercising effective collegiality with the Pope. As a foundational principle, he declared that he sees in the episcopal synod a manifestation of collegiality: “The synodal activity in virtue of episcopal order mirrors [represents] that affective and effective communion which constitutes the Synod of Bishops’ primary purpose... Then, Francis clarifies that he wants to promote affective and effective communion in obedience to Vatican II: ‘I wish to give full value [*desidero valorizzare*] to this precious heritage of the council.’” Ladislav Orsy, “Francis’ New Order,” *National Catholic Reporter (NCR)*, 19 June, 2014, and *Tablet*, 19 June, 2014, [Tablet Website](http://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/2624/francis-new-order), retrieved 21 June, 2014, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/2624/francis-new-order>

In an interview with the author at Georgetown University on 9 October, 2014, Orsy confirmed that “affective collegiality” involves a consultative process by the world bishops while “effective collegiality” involves a deliberative process (decision-making that includes voting to reach a consensus). Francis wants national bishops’ conferences to be more involved in the collegial process and ideally present a consensus view on a particular pastoral topic from the grassroots level. The Holy Spirit works through the consensus of these local bishops.

Orsy said that SCCs are operating as a canonical, juridical units. SCCs include both the territorial model (church in the neighborhood) and the specialized model (members with like interests such as Georgetown alumni in the Washington DC area forming SCCs). They have both canonical and spiritual dimensions. We agreed that the Catholic Church needs an African Avery Dulles to develop the Church as Family of God Model of Church.

¹⁶ See *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, Orbis Books, 1996, Wif & Stock Publishers, 2006.

sexual abusers, families with abusers of alcohol, forced marriages of young girls to older men, homosexuals (gays, lesbians); marriages with domestic abuse; marriages with sexual abuse; and economically poor single mothers?

In Eastern Africa Small Christian Communities (SCCs) were part of this consultation process especially through their parishes and national bishops' conferences. SCC members in Eastern Africa contributed answers to the survey questions whose results were coordinated by the Pastoral Departments of the national bishops' conferences in the AMECEA Region.¹⁷ For example, the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) answered the 39 questions in a 25-page document. SCCs are mentioned seven times including these statements: "Strengthen Small Christian Community discussions on the family as a Domestic Church." "The Catholic Church has provided ministers, support groups and Small Christian Communities to support and journey with couples in crisis situations." "Small Christian Communities should participate fully in family issues."

SCC members also sent their answers and comments directly to the Synod of Bishops Office in Rome¹⁸ and through other groups and organizations (like the Focolare Movement). Overall, however, this grassroots consultation was not widespread in Eastern Africa.

This process has been an opportunity to talk about the pastoral needs of people in real situations in Africa. It was hoped that the two synods will provide a realistic assessment of family life today and propose concrete pastoral approaches to meeting these challenges. A 19 November, 2013 "Editorial" in the *National Catholic Reporter (NCR)* states: "There is the danger that the media-rich West could dominate the discussion. Care will have to be taken to hear the voices of families in the Global South." Voices of lay people "on the ground" in Africa can make an important contribution to the future of the family based on and in the light of the Gospel and African cultural values. Delegates from the AMECEA Countries can emphasize key "African" priorities and points in their "Interventions" at the World Synods of Bishops in Rome in October, 2014 and October, 2015. The voice and practical pastoral experience of the African Church is very important at these universal meetings.

Yet an example of how these Vatican documents are often written from a too Western perspective is pointed out by Laurenti Magesa:

¹⁷ The AMECEA Pastoral Department synthesized the answers from the nine AMECEA countries for joint discussion and further planning at the AMECEA Plenary Assembly in Lilongwe, Malawi in July, 2014. One topic was "New evangelization as an opportunity to work towards true conversion and witnessing to Christian faith, with emphasis on the role of Family Life and Small Christian Communities."

¹⁸ It is gratifying that our report "Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Promote Family Ministry/Family Life Apostolate in Eastern Africa" was received by the Synod of Bishops Office in the Vatican with this answer: "Thank you for your e-mail and the attached file which we have printed out and delivered to those who are analyzing and summarizing the responses and observations to the questions in the Preparatory Document. Please convey our appreciation for the work, effort and concern involved!"

The *Lineamenta* tries to list some of the striking features of the present situation, including – to mention only those most immediately urgent in the African churches – premarital cohabitation, single-parent families, polygamy,¹⁹ and dowry or bridewealth. To say, as the *Lineamenta* does, that these are situations that “were unheard of until a few years ago” does not reflect the African reality. Polygamy and bridewealth as social institutions in Africa predate by far Christian evangelization, and all indications show that they are not about to disappear.²⁰

He adds:

Implied here, it seems, is the recognition that ‘family’ is experienced differently in different places, to which experiences the Gospel should be applied. Hence the need for Local Churches around the world to bring concrete “proposals” from their own situations to this dialogical table of the universal church, confident that – as She has always consistently done – the Holy Spirit will show us the way through whatever human muddle we may be in at the moment...

Without popular involvement [of the African Churches] in the process, the “pastoral policies” arising out of it will remain simply another in the long list of those impractical Catholic curiosities as far as the life of the people is concerned.²¹

To use the words of Pope Francis may the African delegates at the two synods be “bold and creative.”

¹⁹ Laurenti Magesa presents some interesting and challenging pastoral questions and solutions on polygamy in “Reflections on Marriage in Africa,” Nairobi: Unpublished paper 2014.

²⁰ Laurenti Magesa, “The Synod on the Family and Africa,” Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church (CTEWC) Website, retrieved on 6 June, 2014, <http://www.catholicethics.com/forum-submissions/the-synod-on-the-family-and-africa>

²¹ *Ibid.*

2. Analyzing the Reality of Family and Marriage in Eastern Africa Today

Before answering the questions it is helpful to use Step One “See” of the Pastoral Spiral to analyze the local reality of family and marriage in Eastern Africa today.²² “Family and Faith” was the theme of Week Two in the Kenyan Lenten Campaign 2014 booklet *How Can We Be One?...for the Sanctification and Salvation of All People*. In the “Preface” to the booklet Archbishop Zacchaeus Okoth, Chairman of Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, states:

This year Pope Francis has called a special synod on the family. He wants the synod to examine the pastoral challenges experienced by families. The topic for Week 2 is “Family and Faith.” The institution of the family is continuously being challenged. In Kenya we have seen proposed laws touching on family and marriages presented in parliament that do not take into account both the African and Christian values. In our discussions we must look for ways we can fight this monster that has come to destroy the family. We need to have a unity of purpose for us to address this challenge.”²³

Using the “See,” “Judge”²⁴ and “Act” method/process, the Situational Analysis Section identifies 10 challenges to the family in Kenya today:

The family today is faced with many challenges that threaten to tear it apart. They include an anti-Christian culture, divorce, busyness, absent parent

²² The Editorial in the 20 September, 2014 *Tablet* states: “Accepting marriage as it is means accepting people as they are, warts and all – and their relationships as they are, stressed, broken, or harmonious and calm.” “Frowns Do Not Defend Marriage,” The Tablet Website, retrieved on 19 September, 2014 <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/downloadpdf/200914issue.pdf> The phrase “warts and all” means “The whole including all blemishes, faults, and shortcomings -- not concealing the less attractive parts.” This phrase is said to derive from Oliver Cromwell (Lord Protector of England in the 17th Century)'s instructions to the painter Sir. Peter Lely, when commissioning his portrait.

²³ Zacchaeus Okoth, Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, *How Can We Be One?...for the Sanctification and Salvation of All People*, Kenya Lenten Campaign, 2014, Nairobi: KCCB Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, 2014, p. 7.

²⁴ Calling the second step “discerning” or “interpreting” or “analysing” or “evaluating” is preferred by some because the English word “judge” is associated with the word “judgement” and “judgemental.”

figure, indiscipline, financial pressures,²⁵ lack of communication, negative media influences, balance of work and family and materialism.²⁶

The AMECEA Pastoral Department based in Nairobi, Kenya in November, 2013 also identified 10 challenges or problems under the heading: “Reality of the Problem Being Addressed:

Many families in the AMECEA Region, and indeed around the world face a lot of challenges such as: separation, divorce, cohabitation, polygamy, poor parenting, economic problems, impact of education systems, the distortion of the meaning of marriage, gender violence and other abuses that negatively affect the family.²⁷

This research is part of its *Strategic Plan for 2013-2016* that focuses on “The Christian Family Life Campaign for the Protection of the Dignity and Value of Marriage and Family Life.”

Cieslikiewicz assesses the Tanzanian situation this way:

Above all the big question emerges: how are we to promote a powerfully supportive Christian community-culture of God’s family against family dissolution and despite the pressures of the media and of a hedonistic society? Not only are family values attacked, but also the phenomenon of single mothers, divorces and free unions threaten the institution of the family. In this way life in communion and its expressions are threatened more and more by individualism and materialism.²⁸

All this local reality is within the context of (alphabetically) growing consumerism, globalization, materialism, relativism, secularism/secularization and urbanization throughout Africa.

Pope Francis challenges us to look at and respond to the present family reality. In Africa countries where most people “can identify at once with Jesus who was poor and marginalized,” the pope said, Catholics provide loving service to “God’s most vulnerable sons and daughters:

²⁵ One concrete example is the seemingly endless challenge and nagging concern of paying school fees especially in primary and secondary school. This affects many African families across the board.

²⁶ Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, *How Can We Be One?* p. 19.

²⁷ See AMECEA Pastoral Department, “Training and Capacity Building for the Coordinators of National Commissions for Marriage and Family Life in the AMECEA Countries.” Nairobi: Privately Published, 2013.

²⁸ Christopher Cieslikiewicz, “Urban Small Christian Communities,” p. 92.

widows, single mothers, the divorced, children at risk and especially the several million AIDS orphans, many of whom head households in rural areas.”²⁹

A recent 2013 study in Our Lady Queen of Heaven Parish in Karen, Nairobi, Kenya identified the following 12 factors that contribute to the lack of marital commitment: sexual dissatisfaction; violence to children and spouse; absence of love; conflict in roles; family interference; childlessness in marriage; infidelity in marriage; failure to cooperate with each other; personality conflict; problem of mixed marriage; couples from different cultural backgrounds; and challenges of the extended family.³⁰

Mrs. Rose Musimba, Kenyan lay woman, the former Chairperson of the Parish Pastoral Council of Holy Trinity Parish, Buruburu I, Nairobi and a member of our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team, affirms many of these challenges and factors in the following comments on the changes in Kenya society:

There is a lack of commitment to a permanent marriage. If a couple feel their marriage is not working, they just split up. There is more emphasis on conditional marriages. If certain conditions don't work out, the two people separate and go their own way. Even with plenty of marriage counseling, many couples don't focus on the basis issues and easily give up in their marriages. If we remove God from marriage we are done. Without Christian values we are finished.³¹

Simon Rurinjah, Kenyan layman, evangelist and a member of our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team, who died in 2015 pointed out:

Some of the challenges in Kenya threaten to tear up our Catholic families such as divorce caused by financial pressures. If a married woman is earning more than her husband there is often no compromise and the marriage is often in danger and it is hard to maintain peace and unity. The wife is often the first to go to the court and file for a divorce. There is little chance to educate the children. Couples stop praying to God who joined them together. Where there is no justice and peace how can we expect this family to be a Domestic Church Family of God.³²

²⁹ Francis, “Violence against Women Harms Society, Pope Tells African Bishops,” *Catholic Information Service for Africa (CISA) Email News Bulletin*. Issue No. 35, Tuesday, 29 September, 2014. and on the CISA Website, <http://cisanewsafrika.com/vatican-violence-against-women-harms-society-pope-tells-african-bishops>

³⁰ Solomon Gbaki, *The Pastoral Challenge of Marital Commitment: A Case Study of Our Lady Queen of Heaven Parish in Karen, Nairobi*, Nairobi: Unpublished Long Essay at Don Bosco Utume Salesian Theological College, 2014.

³¹ Rose Musimba, cellphone interview with the author, 29 January, 2014.

³² Simon Rurinjah, conversation with the author, 29 January, 2014.

Tanzanian Sister Rita Ishengoma, STH, a member of our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team based in Bukoba, Tanzania, says that one of the challenges of SCCs in Tanzania is involving men in the SCC Meetings:

A family without a father is “wounded.” So is a SCC without the presence of men. Men are not against SCCs, but they need to be approached. They will be interested to come when our meetings are timely and serious. Men are like that everywhere.³³

Premarital cohabitation without marriage is increasing worldwide. In Kenya it is described as a *come we stay* (a popular Kenyan saying) arrangement when a man and a woman begin living together. It is especially an urban phenomenon. During a mass wedding of 34 couples at Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church, Kiambu, Nairobi, Kenya in December, 2013 the *National Mirror* reports that “Cardinal John Njue reached out to couples who have not solemnized their unions and are living in *come we stay* arrangements, urging them to take the bold step and embrace the sacrament of marriage.”³⁴ He challenged parents saying that the dowry should not be a stumbling block for financial reasons, but ought to cement the bonds of love and family. Njue said that dowry cannot be greater than God.

In a related example Cardinal Njue visited Christ the King Church, Kangemi, Nairobi on 30 March, 2014. He said that this is the “Year of the Family and Marriage” and challenged Catholic parents of demanding too much dowry. There are parents who are willing to arrange the marriage of their children but are unable because the father of the groom does not enough dowry for his son. Other parents deny the wedding in the church unless the full customary dowry is paid.

Njue gave an example of a father who arranged for a man to marry his daughter in the Catholic Church. The customary dowry was paid in the Kikuyu tradition. The wedding was announced and the groom asked Cardinal Njue to join them during their wedding and the cardinal agreed. With one week remaining before the wedding in the church the parents of the bride requested 200,000 Kenyan shillings (approximately \$2,225) more from the groom. He failed to raise the money and so the church wedding had to stop. The cardinal sent for the father of the bride to discuss this new demand. But the father of the bride said to the parish priest to allow the wedding to continue since he didn’t want to have to face the cardinal. Cardinal Njue informed the parents that marriage is a sacrament and not something for parents to get rich.³⁵

³³ Rita Ishengoma, “Three Challenges of SCCs in Tanzania,” Bukoba: Unpublished Report, 1 page.

³⁴ Kamau Gitau, “A Long Walk Down the Aisle,” *National Mirror*, 01:14 (January/February, 2014), p. 18.

³⁵ Reported by Simon Rurinjah.

There is a similar situation to *come we stay* in Uganda. *Kasefuliya* is the Ganda word for “small cooking pot.” It is used to symbolize the domestic arrangement of a couple living together before they get married in the Catholic Church. The Ganda noun for the state of marriage is *bufumbo* from the verb *kufumba* that means “to cook.”

Openness to the possibility of communion for divorced and remarried Catholics is a complex issue. In preparation for the October, 2014 World Synod of Bishops this was the most talked about topic in Europe especially in Germany. It is less discussed in Africa. Univision (February, 2014) conducted a scientific poll of more than 12,000 Catholics in 12 countries representing Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America. The results represent an interesting snapshot of current opinion within the body of the Catholic Church. There was a question: Do you agree or disagree with Catholic Church policy on divorce that says “An individual who has divorced and remarried outside of the Catholic Church, is living in sin which prevents them from receiving Communion”? The results were as follows:

Europe (France, Italy, Poland and Spain)

Agree: 19%

Disagree: 75%

No answer: 6%

Africa (Democratic Republic of the Congo – DRC and Uganda)

Agree: 75%

Disagree: 19%

No answer: 6%³⁶

On the results of the poll Italian Cardinal Carlo Caffarra, the Archbishop of Bologna, Italy, observes:

75% of most countries in Africa are against allowing the divorced and remarried to receive communion. And so I ask again: which expectations are we talking about? Those of Africa or Europe? Does the Western world have the monopoly on what the Church should preach? Are we still stuck in that paradigm or have we started to listen, even just a little bit, to the poor? I am left perplexed when it is said we must go in a certain direction or there is no point in having the synod. Which direction? The direction desired by middle Europe? Well, why not the direction desired by the African community?³⁷

During a SCCs Workshop in Lusaka, Zambia in December, 2013 Mulenga said that he is very compassionate and empathetic with couples he knows in Zambia who had a bad first

³⁶Univision Global Survey of Roman Catholics, Bendixen and Amadi International Website, retrieved on 9 March, 2014, <http://bendixenandamadi.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/ExecutiveSummary.pdf>

³⁷ “Cardinal Caffarra Expresses Serious Concerns about Family Synod Debates,” “ZENIT: The World Seen from Rome,” email message dated 24 March, 2014.

marriage, got remarried and have been living together in a happy, stable marriage for 20 years or so – and are faithful Catholics who regularly participate in Sunday Mass. He said the Zambian Bishops are open to finding ways to help these people to be able to receive communion.³⁸

In talking informally with various pastoral agents in Eastern Africa I hear suggestions that the Catholic Church should not be rigid, but flexible in dealing with these pastoral problems. Marriage cases should must be looked at on a one-by-one basis. Some comments: Young African Catholic girls can be forced into even sacrament marriages due to family, cultural and dowry pressures – often marrying men much older than them. An example was given of a couple in a valid sacramental marriage who had four children. The husband left his wife and children. The wife remained a practicing Catholic and raised faithfully raised her children in the Catholic Church. She wanted a father for her children so remarried “outside” of the Catholic Church and now has a long time, stable marriage. How can she be helped to receive the sacraments again?

Financial/economic pressures are a challenge that is constantly discussed and prayed about in our SCCs in Eastern Africa. A particular problem is “school fees.” SCCs members, especially in poorer areas, are constantly looking for money to pay the fees and needs of their children in primary schools and high schools. Another issue is the effect of two working (and salaried) parents on the quality of family life. With fulltime jobs they are spending less and less time at home. The education of their children suffers.

A situational analysis in Eastern Africa identified various abuses in the family as an important concern. The AMECEA Report at the Continental SCCs Workshop in Karen in September, 2012 under the theme “Ways to Implement Reconciliation, Justice and Peace” stated that we need to look at the concrete situations of life in the light of the Gospel (e.g. good governance, democratic space, child abuse and child protection). SCC members have opportunities to participate in awareness building and training workshops. The Spec Training and Consultancy Centre (STCC) in Nairobi is conducting workshops on Child Protection Policies in Nairobi in 2014.

To summarize this overall analysis, here is part of the Chairman of AMECEA Cardinal Berhaneyesus Souraphiel’s intervention at the synod on “The Pastoral Challenges of the Family, External Pressures on the Family” (*Instrumentum Laboris* Nos. 70 – 75) at the October, 2014 World Synod of Bishops itself: The pastoral challenges that face the Catholic families in Africa are (author’s **bold**):

1. **Poverty**: material poverty forces husbands or wives to migrate within countries or go to neighboring countries or abroad, especially in the Arab world. This creates cracks in the marriage bond.
2. **Migration** is also linked to trafficking and also dispersion of children, who most of the time spill over to become street children and prone to be trafficked and abused.

³⁸ Clement Mulenga in a conversation with the author in Lusaka, Zambia on 4 December, 2013.

3. **HIV/AIDS:**³⁹ a disease which creates division in the family and frequently divorce. Usually, both parents are affected and, sometimes both die, leaving children under the care of grandparents.⁴⁰ **NOTE:** “71% of the 35 million people living with HIV/AIDS in the world live in sub-Saharan Africa. The call by (UNAIDS) to close the gap around access to HIV services will not be met unless the delivery of antiretroviral treatment (ARV)

³⁹ This very important challenge/problem for Africa has a surprising history. Given its very serious effect on marriage, family and relationships in general, it has received very little attention. It is significant that HIV/AIDS was not specifically mentioned in the 39 questions of the original questionnaire. Some African countries such as Kenya did not mention HIV/AIDS in its answer to the last question: “What other challenges or proposals do you consider urgent of useful to treat?” The coordinator of the compilation of answers in Kenya said that this was an oversight due to the pressure of limited time. Author’s interview with Kenyan laywoman Theresa Abuya, Nairobi, Kenya, 25 June 2014.

HIV/AIDS was not mentioned in the *Final Report of the Synod*, another indication of the Western influence on the synod discussions and documentation. Cameroonian African theologian Father Jacquineau Azetsop, SJ says “HIV was totally absent. The synod was totally dominated by issues from the first world. It is unfortunate that African bishops forgot about it also.” Email to the author dated 1 December, 2014. Commentators in North America and Europe are merely saying that the HIV/AIDS problem is being handled by medicine (that is, the “cocktail” of anti-retroviral drugs). This is fueled by news reports in the West such as:

HIV is evolving to become less deadly and less infectious, according to a major scientific study. The team at the University of Oxford shows the virus is being "watered down" as it adapts to our immune systems. It said it was taking longer for HIV infection to cause AIDS and that the changes in the virus may help efforts to contain the pandemic. Some virologists suggest the virus may eventually become "almost harmless" as it continues to evolve.

James Gallagher, “HIV evolving 'into milder form'” BBC News Website, 1 December 2014, retrieved on 2 December, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/health-30254697>

⁴⁰ Chairman of AMECEA Cardinal Berhaneyesus D. Souraphie’s intervention began: “I speak on behalf of the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa (AMECEA) whose chairman I have been elected by my brother bishops in our Plenary in Malawi in July, 2014. AMECEA is a regional association which is comprised of eleven countries in Eastern Africa and the Horn of Africa, together with Djibouti and Somalia as affiliated members...” The full text of his presentation is published in *AMECEA Online Newsletter*, No. 70 (14 November, 2014), AMECEA Website, retrieved 14 November, 2014, http://amecea.blogspot.com/2014/11/ethiopia-extract-of-chairman-of-amecea.html?utm_source=AMECEA+Newsletter&utm_campaign=5720a96ca8-AMECEA+Online+Newsletter+6+5+2013&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_85fa866553-5720a96ca8-6746297

is radically reshaped into community-led approaches that adapt to the realities of those living with HIV.”⁴¹

It is very important to understand that these three challenges are interconnected and interrelated and part of Africa’s overall social, cultural, economic and political context and reality.

Souraphiel balances these problem areas by saying (author’s **bold**):

In order to strengthen Catholic families in the region, the positive elements of **traditional African family values** (e.g. respect for life, love of children, respect of mothers, right influence of the extended family, respect for elders, etc.) need to be taught in schools, in parishes, and in institutions... In spite of the many challenges and difficulties of married life, there is also **joy and happiness in Catholic families**. There are saints in family life: grandparents, parents, children, and even unborn children.⁴²

3. Answers to the First Four Questions in the Questionnaire/Survey of the *Lineamenta* of the 2014 Synod of Bishops

The first four questions in the questionnaire/survey treated the teaching of the Catholic Church’s post-conciliar magisterium on the family and marriage under the title “The Diffusion of the Teachings on the Family in Sacred Scripture and the Church’s Magisterium.” This is a deductive approach, from the top down. An inductive approach, starting with the reality of family and marriage in the world today, would have been more creative and helpful. The word “diffusion” is one of those Latin-English words that is hard for the ordinary Catholic to understand similar to “dissemination” or “propagation.” Better expressions would be “communication” or “transmission.”

Concerning the Catholic Church’s teaching, in his apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis offers pastors of the Catholic Church guidance on how to interpret traditional teaching concerning marriage and family life. One principle is that “the Church has rules or precepts which may have been quite effective in their time, but no longer have the same usefulness for directing and shaping people’s lives” (No. 43). Another was that “the Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak” (No. 47). These words are particularly relevant to two of the most contentious issues raised in present consultation on marriage and family life: contraception and the admission of divorced and remarried Catholics to Holy Communion.

⁴¹ “Flexibility in Health Systems and Community Approach that Adapts to the Daily Realities of HIV-positive People,” *Fides News*, 29 November, 2014

⁴² *Ibid.*

The Local Churches in Africa can make a special contribution to these questions. AMECEA emphasizes developing SCCs as a concrete expression and realization of the Church as Family Model of Church that reflects the ecclesiology of communion of Vatican II. The 1994 First African Synod developed the specific ecclesial identity of the Church as Family of God in Africa while the 2009 Second African Synod 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.

St. John Paul II's 1995 Apostolic Exhortation *The Church in Africa* Number 63, under "The Church as God's Family" states: "It is earnestly to be hoped that theologians in Africa will work out the theology of the Church as Family with all the riches contained in this concept, showing its complementarity with other images of the Church." In this Church as Family of God Model of Church, along with parish-based SCCs and lectionary-based SCCs, we can talk of family-based SCCs. In Eastern Africa a SCC is a communion of families. SCCs made up of families are Africa's strength. SCCs are part of the "Communion of Communities Model of Church."

As African theologians explore more deeply the "Church as Family of God Model of Church," we see the growing importance of the "Small Christian Community Model of Church" that is closely related to the "Communion of Communities Model of Church" and the "Communitarian Model of Church." The Communitarian/Participatory/Collaborative/Circular/Inductive/Bottom-up Model can be compared and contrasted to the Hierarchical/Institutional/Pyramid/Deductive/Top-down Model.⁴³

How is the recent praxis of SCCs in Africa contributing to the development of the theology of the Church as Family of God? African cultural relationships and communal life are the foundations that provides a developing model of a church based on the African family. Small Christian Communities are affirmed as the fundamental building blocks of the Church as Family of God in Africa. Stated another way, SCCs are the ideal foundational units of building the Church as Family of God.

In the *Final Message of the Bishops of Africa to the People of God* of the First African Synod, Section 28 on "The Church as Family and Small Christian Communities" the bishops state: "The Church, the Family of God, implies the creation of small communities at the human level, living or basic ecclesial communities... These individual Churches as Families have the task of working to transform society." Democratic Republic of the Congo theologian Father Bénézet Bujo emphasizes that "the bishops of the African Synod declared that the Church in Africa should make the family model their own and Small Christian Communities have stressed this concept of family."⁴⁴ Irish missionary and theologian Father Kieran Flynn, SPS asserts: "It

⁴³ See the section "Small Christian Communities: Ecclesiologies and Models of Church" in Kieran Flynn, *Communities for the Kingdom: A Handbook for Small Christian Community Leaders*, Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications, *Spearhead* Nos. 181-182, 2007, pp. 67-81.

⁴⁴ Bujo, Bénézet, *Plea for Change of Models of Marriage*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2009, p. 14.

is in being transforming communities [of themselves and others] that SCCs realize their ecclesial identity in the Church as Family Model.”⁴⁵

We continue to explore in depth how the praxis and theology of SCCs are an integral part of a relevant and credible African ecclesiology based on the Church as Family of God. This is within the context of the AMECEA priority of developing a theological framework of addressing key issues and challenges of “New Evangelization in Solidarity in the AMECEA Countries.”

4. SCCs’ Involvement in Family and Marriage Ministry and Evangelization

First it is important to understand the African context for marriage, family and raising children. Traditionally marriage in Africa is not just between a man and a woman, but between two families and even two clans. The children belong to the community and not just to the biological parents. Bujo asserts:

For African marriage is not a private affair but embraces the extended families⁴⁶ of both husband and wife, the living dead and the yet unborn. The Western model of marriage that distinguishes between the civil and the religious has little meaning. Marriage is always religious... There is no marriage without both God and the ancestors.⁴⁷

Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins help in raising the children. Cardinal Berhaneyesus Souraphiel states: “As Pope Francis is pointing out to the world, if it listens, to defend the family, especially the Christian Family based on fathers and mothers including the grandparents.” We have some interesting Case Studies of the specific importance of the grandparents in passing on the Catholic Faith to their grandchildren. The SCCs and the *Mahber* can be important support groups in which this takes place. This is so well expressed in the picturesque Sukuma, Tanzania proverb *One knee does not bring up a child*.

This important role of the wider community is seen in the many “African Proverbs

⁴⁵ Flynn, *Communities*, p. 99.

⁴⁶ Tanzanian theologian Father Laurenti Magesa and other African theologians and scholars emphasize that “extended family” originates from a Western sociological conception of family structures. For Africans this wide network of aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, etc. is simply “family” or on a wider scale “clan.” Many have pointed out that this wide family network is the Africans’ worst enemy as well as best friend. This family solidarity system (called “the economy of affection”) can help needy members, but the more financially successful members can be constantly preyed upon by their “poor cousins.”

⁴⁷ Bujo, Bénézet, *Plea for Change of Models of Marriage*, p. 17.

and Sayings Related to Small Christian Communities (SCCs)” listed in Appendix 22 on pages 555-558 of the Ebook *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa* by Joseph Healey. The African value of community is expressed in the conviction of the fundamental African proverb *I am because we are; we are because I am*.⁴⁸ This has important implications for SCC Members. They accompany the betrothed couple on each stage of their whole marriage journey. Among the Sukuma people in Tanzania sometimes the priest blesses the handing over of the cows (the dowry) from the father of the bridegroom to the father of the bride in a religious ceremony followed by a festive meal. SCC members participate and give support.

Yet some of these values are changing in contemporary Africa especially through urbanization and secularism/secularization.

The Fourth Arua, Uganda Diocesan Synod 2005 described the close link between families and SCCs:

We will be empowering the Christians and Christian Communities. This means that all stakeholders intensify their activities right from the families, Small Christian Communities, Chapels, Parish, Diocesan departments and institutions. Much has to be done to the families and SCCs so that they became a center for the spiritual and material development of the Christians. Therefore the role of parents and SCCs should be reinforced in order to change the negative attitudes of the people.

SCCs are involved in family ministry/family life apostolate/family evangelization⁴⁹ that includes marriage ministry,⁵⁰ youth ministry, and a variety of other pastoral ministries and spiritual ministries. Research on the 180,000 SCCs in Eastern Africa reveals two approaches that work together. Family ministry is carried out in the SCCs that have an ecclesial identity in themselves. Parish-based SCCs elect lay ministers/animators/ coordinators for:

1. Specific groups: Couples (married and engaged), Youth and Children.
2. Specific pastoral ministries: Catechesis, Justice and Peace, Religious Education, Sacraments and Spiritual/Religious Formation.

SCC members also actively participate in family ministry and marriage ministry on the outstation, subparish and parish levels.

⁴⁸ See Chapter III on “Marriage and Family Life” in *African Cultural Domains Book 2: Cycle of Family and Interpersonal Relationships*, edited by Michael Kirwen, Nairobi: MIAS Books, 2010.

⁴⁹ These three expressions are used interchangeably.

⁵⁰ Marriage ministry is inclusive of marriage counseling that can be very “problem-centered” (couples having marital difficulties) and encouraging/advising/helping young couples to get married in a sacramental marriage.

The series of six questions in the questionnaire on “The Pastoral Care of the Family in Evangelization” is particularly relevant to SCCs in Eastern Africa. One question asks: “What pastoral care has the Church provided in supporting couples in formation and couples in crisis situations?”

A beautiful Case Study of pastoral care and inculturation is “Celebrating the Sacrament of Marriage at the Small Christian Community (SCC) Level in Malawi” by Malawian Montfort priest Samuel Satiele, SMM. He vividly describes a wedding mass that took place at the home of the bride (matrilineal society) in a SCC in Namitembo Parish, Zomba Diocese, Malawi with this evaluation:

This practice restores the communitarian aspect of the African family which is vital. By registering the marriage at that SCC, involving counselors of that SCC, announcing marriage bands at that SCC and celebrating the sacrament itself at that SCC, the local community is involved. There is greater participation of relatives and this makes them feel part and parcel of the process.⁵¹

By celebrating marriages in the homes of SCC members many more people in the neighborhood participate. This includes friends and neighbors who are not Catholics and Muslims. SCCs have a special way of being inclusive that could not happen at the parish church.

SCCs in Eastern Africa choose one of its lay members (usually a married person) to be responsible for marriage ministry. This leader both advises young people to sacramentalize their marriages in church and counsels couples who are having marital difficulties. Musimba points out:

The SCC members more easily notice problems among couples. One or two women in the SCC should take the wife apart privately. One or two men in the SCC should take the husband apart privately. Then the SCC members should talk with the couple together to encourage dialog among them. Prayer is important throughout.⁵²

Segment Two of the video *The Church in the Neighborhood: Small Christian Communities* portrays “Services (Ministries) in the SCC” with a focus on the SCCs in St. Joseph the Worker Parish in Nairobi Archdiocese. One very important and necessary service/ministry is “Marriage Animator/Marriage Counselor.” The video points out that “more than half of our Catholic married people have never received the sacrament of marriage” and thus cannot receive the sacrament of the Eucharist. Solutions are discussed in the SCC regarding problems such as

⁵¹ The full Case Study is available on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website at: <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/africa/malawi/55-malawi.html>

⁵² Musimba, *Ibid.*

high dowry payments, drunkenness, financial irresponsibility and opposition to mixed marriages.⁵³

Statistics in Nairobi Archdiocese show as many as 60% of Catholic couples have not sacramentalized their marriages (had their marriages blessed in church). Thus they cannot receive communion.⁵⁴ “The traditional reasons of the high dowry payment and high cost of the wedding itself (including the reception) remain, but other new reasons have strongly emerged. First, young Catholics are reluctant to make permanent, lifetime commitments.⁵⁵ They prefer living together for a period of time to “test” their relationship. This is related to the *come we stay* arrangement when a man and a woman begin living together before formalizing their marriage. Second, as Kenyan diocesan priest Father Deogratias Kibirango points out having so many broken marriages makes young people fear this institution.⁵⁶ Third, married women increasingly leave their husbands if he loses his job or cannot provide financial security to the family. One Kenyan Sister told me that we need nothing less than “an aggressive campaign to help couples to sacramentalize their marriages.”⁵⁷

For various reasons a number of Catholic women want children, but not a husband and a permanent, lifetime marriage. More equality in the government marriage laws is raising new tensions and questions.

There are different patterns in Eastern Africa. While traveling in Malawi in December, 2013, I was pleasantly surprised that many people receive communion at the Sunday masses and major feasts. I was told that many young people are getting married in the Catholic Church today.

During a SCCs Class at Tangaza in February, 2014 we had an animated discussion on Catholic marriages in Africa. One seminarian raised a provocative question: “Why do candidates for the priesthood spend eight to 10 years in formation and studies before ordination to the priesthood (a sacrament in the Catholic Church and a **permanent, lifetime commitment**) while couples preparing for marriage (also a sacrament in the Catholic Church and a **permanent,**

⁵³ Taken from *The Church in the Neighborhood: Small Christian Communities* (with Swahili and Arabic versions). Nairobi: Ukweli Video Productions, 1995. Segment I: “Life and Activities of SCCs.” Segment II: “Services (Ministries) in the SCC.”

⁵⁴ I personally experienced this reality. In Nairobi on 19 April, 2015 I celebrated a Sunday Mass for 101 people. 43 received communion.

⁵⁵ For an increasing number of couples worldwide “until love do us apart” has replaced “until death do us apart.” In other words the lifetime commitment in all situations has been replaced by we can split/separate/divorce if problems arise and mutual love wanes and even disappears.

⁵⁶ See Henry Onyango and Stephen Mukhongi, “Tackling Pastoral Challenges Facing the Family,” *Seed*, Vol. 26, Nos. 8/9, p. 10.

⁵⁷ Sister Esther Ichugu, conversation with the author, Nairobi, Kenya, 14 April, 2014.

lifetime commitment) can have as few as three marriage instructions before their wedding in church?” Another asked: “How come? Why is there such a big difference?” A random sample of marriage instructions in Nairobi Archdiocese ranged from a Crash Course of two weeks to three two hour sessions with the priest to five sessions spread over one and a half months to a six month marriage preparation program. Clearly more needs to be done in depth in preparing couples for Catholic Marriage. Better marriage catechesis should be a high priority.

Ethiopia and Eritrea have a traditional devotional small community or association called *Mahber*. It is a devotional group with a long history and significance. It offers important social support in the Ethiopian family system. Some of the activities of *Mahberat* (plural) in Ethiopia are:

- The small community reconciles members who have disputes through special ceremonies. When every member does not drink from the ceremonial pot (cup), the leaders immediately know something is wrong and try to reconcile the disputing parties. Once reconciled, both parties drink together.
- Helping at marriages, anniversaries and funerals. This includes encouraging young people in the association to get married in the Catholic Church, providing the choir at different events and organizing and serving at the related social events.

Thus a serious, ongoing challenge for SCCs is to help many of their members to regularize their marriages in a Catholic ceremony. One increasingly hears the expression “Eucharistic Famine” referring to the many, many Catholics in Africa who cannot receive communion because they are not officially married in the Catholic Church. Botswana Bishop Boniface Tshosa emphasizes that this situation causes much pain in an African context:

Many [people], because of what we call irregular marriage situations cannot receive the Eucharist -- the Food of Life. In Botswana, food is a symbol of welcome, of togetherness, of sharing, of celebration, of solidarity. To exclude someone from the Eucharist in Botswana, is interpreted as being excluded from God's company and God's love. Words expressing otherwise do not convince.⁵⁸

Some SCCs have a campaign to help their members to overcome some of the main stumbling blocks such as finalizing the dowry and raising money for the expenses of the marriage celebration.⁵⁹ Our research has gathered case studies of marriages that take place in the home of SCC members and are less expensive than in a Catholic Parish Church. SCCs help couples in

⁵⁸ Boniface Tshosa, intervention at the 1994 First African Synod, “Fifth General Congregation,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, 17, 1338 (27 April, 1994), p. 11.

⁵⁹ Servant of God Cardinal Maurice Michael Otunga liked to give the example of the SCC in Nairobi Archdiocese that donated the bride’s wedding dress to a couple in its small community who had insufficient money for all their needs for their Marriage Ceremony in the Catholic Church.

arranging Multiple or Group Wedding Ceremonies (many marriages celebrated together at the same time or *ndoa za kwa pamoja* in Swahili) in their outstations and parishes to cut down on the overall expenses.

One SCC member pointed out that we Small Christian Communities adult members are supposed to show a good example to others. It is very embarrassing if our children ask for church weddings before their parents get married in church. Nigerian Salesian seminarian Chiemeka Maria Utazi, SDB confirms this in his analysis on “Good Parenthood: “If youth don’t see their fathers or parents in SCC, they say, why should we go? If their parents are not married in the church, they ask questions on the need of SCCs?”⁶⁰

Sometimes the SCC sends a small committee to mediate a marriage dispute. A Swahili video segment called *Jumuiya ya Upatanisho – Gekano, Kisii* [Kenya] (“SCC of Reconciliation–Gekano, Kisii [Kenya]”) has a short play⁶¹ about a husband and wife who have a dispute over money. A delegation from the SCC composed of two men and two women visit the couple in their home. They discuss the problem, pray together and resolve the dispute. Then the couple witnesses to their reconciliation in the whole small community. This example of a delegation of SCC members is similar to the designated committee of small community members (*Mahber* and SCCs) used in Ethiopia for marriage counseling.

The SCCs in Moshi Diocese, Tanzania, have a special charism for mediating family disputes especially tensions and disagreements between husband and wife. Sometimes this is done by the whole local small community. Other times the Marriage Counselor – a specific pastoral ministry in the SCCs – helps in the reconciliation. As a result of this SCC outreach, many broken and strained marriages have been healed and other conflicts resolved. Following the traditional Chagga Ethnic Group customs, the SCC members use special cultural symbols of reconciliation such as the green *isale* leaf, the *isale* tree (a special reconciliation tree), a white goat and even a baby.

Recent research⁶² in Nairobi shows that SCCs are actively involved mediating marriage disputes. Issues include that the husband is drinking alcohol too much, in-laws are interfering in the marriage and the effect on raising the children in the Catholic faith when one of the spouses joins a Pentecostal Church. Intervention by a small mixed delegation of men and women from the SCC has been often successful. More complicated marriage problems are referred to a trained Marriage Counselor.

⁶⁰ Chiemeka Maria Utazi, “Absence of Youth and Men in Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Eastern Africa,” p. 4, SCCs Website, retrieved on 7 December, 2014, http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/absence_men_youth.pdf

⁶¹ This should be used as a teaching video. A segment is shown and then discussed in small groups.

⁶² Examples are documented in the SCCs Course Papers and answers to the essay exam questions at Tangaza University College and Don Bosco Utume Salesian Theological College in March, April and May, 2014.

On how SCCs can reconcile married couples with problems Rurinjah states: “The couple should remember their vows that they took during their wedding in the church before God and Christians.” He adds: “The married couple should live as people who forgive each other in order to maintain peace in the family. Remember the Gikuyu, Kenya proverb *A home is for a husband and a wife.*”

“Reflection on Adoptive Parent Families” is a catechism lesson in *The Journey of Faith – 5: Together in Jesus’ Family* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2012). It is based on *Matthew* 18:5 and 25:40; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) Nos. 2379, 1654; and *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (CSDC), No. 218. It tells the touching story of Stephen and Caroline, a childless African couple in a Small Christian Community who adopt the three little children of a young couple who lost their lives in a terrible road accident. The lesson also helps SCCs in the ongoing formation of couples and the deeper understanding of family and marriage.⁶³

Regarding how Christian families transmit the faith in Kenya we started SCCs of the Pontifical Missionary Childhood (PMC). Small groups of children meet on Saturdays or Sundays in their parishes to pray and to reflect on the *Bible*. In Kitale Diocese 15 PMC children belong to St. Francisca SCC in Holy Trinity Parish and 30 PMC children belong to St. Ann SCC in St. Peter Claver Parish. Similar SCCs of PMC children are in Chaani Parish in Mombasa Archdiocese. The PMC SCCs use the Lumko "Seven Steps" Method of *Bible* Sharing/Gospel Sharing. The PMC animators are trained first in this method.

Kenyan Salesian seminarian Isaiah Muthukumi, SDB adds:

When men and women especially husbands and wives attend SCC meetings together it unites them more and they are able to plan and bring up their family together. This will help them instill the spirit of prayer and responsibility in their children, mirroring the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Small deeds such as being with the family and praying together are very important.⁶⁴

5. Other Challenges and Proposals in the Questionnaire/Survey of the *Lineamenta* of the 2014 Synod of Bishops

⁶³The full reflection is Appendix 16 in the Ebook -- Joseph Healey, *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa* -- on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website at: http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build_new.pdf

⁶⁴ Isaiah Muthukumi, “Reflection on the Lack of Men and Youth in SCCs,” Nairobi: Unpublished Paper, 2014, p. 4.

The final question in the survey/questionnaire on family and marriage – “What other challenges or proposals related to the topics in the above questions⁶⁵ do you consider urgent and useful to treat?” -- was open-ended and offers wide scope to present the Eastern Africa perspectives and grassroots experiences.

Pope Francis says: “I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities.” One intriguing proposal in Africa for many years is to develop an inculturated Rite for the Catechumenate of Christian Marriage (Marriage Catechumenate) similar to the Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA or the Adult Catechumenate). This could be two years or more depending on the customs and traditions (cultural dimension) of the local ethnic groups in Africa. It would integrate the basic elements of consent in the traditional African marriage rituals into the Christian sacrament of marriage.

This would follow the stages of marriage⁶⁶ in an African context (also called “marriage in stages”) where marriage is a process rather than a single event and marriage is between two families rather than just between two individuals. The Catholic sacramental and spiritual “moments” (not “moment”) would take place during different stages of the marriage process: from the first official meeting and agreement of the two families of the couple to the betrothal (engagement) to the living together to paying of the dowry or bridewealth (that often takes place slowly over many years)⁶⁷ to the wife’s pregnancy to the birth of the first child⁶⁸ to the civil

⁶⁵ It is surprising that HIV/AIDS was not mentioned in the questionnaire. Organizers in Rome said that the questionnaire could not cover all the local challenges and topics and it was the responsibility of National Bishops Conferences, etc. to add their own priorities in answering the last question. It is more surprising, and even disturbing, that some of the answers to the questionnaire from Africa do not mention the topic.

⁶⁶ In an interview with the author in Washington DC on 9 October, 2014 Orsy mentioned that in the history of the Catholic Church the German tribes had a “gradual” approach to the sacrament of marriage. It was confirmed after the couple lived together successfully for six months.

⁶⁷ This important ritual is not well understood by Westerners. In some African ethnic groups the dowry or bridewealth payment lasts a lifetime. The groom is required to pay a major portion of it before being allowed to marry the bride. The balance is paid in portions throughout the couple’s lifetime to ensure that there is a continued relationship between the two families.

⁶⁸ Here is an interesting parallel: “New Catholics who enter the church at the Easter Vigil continue to meet with their group of sponsors and teachers for months after their initiation through a process called *mystagogia*. They are reminded that the parish community still supports them and that the Easter Vigil was not a graduation ceremony from a program, but the start of something new. In a recent email, my friend Isaac posed a question: What might a mystagogical approach to marriage prep look like? Could parishes invite mentor couples to check in on newlyweds at the three-month, six-month, one-year mark? Could parishes gather groups of couples for faith sharing, community service activities, and social events, with babysitting provided as necessary? Surely, many parishes are already doing these and other things to support married couples. But it would be so valuable for the synod to encourage church leaders to

marriage to the Catholic Marriage Rite (that could be in a Catholic Church or in a SCC) to the wedding celebration.⁶⁹

The couple usually live together during most of this process -- what is commonly called premarital cohabitation.⁷⁰ During this period, sometimes called the “trial marriage” or “the test of compatibility” period, the couple test their ability to live together and to get along with their in-laws such as the wife getting along with her mother-in-law if it is a patrilineal society. In African ethnic groups it is essential for the couple to have successful genital intercourse and for the wife to be fertile. If she is barren (as well as not having children) the marriage can break up. More recently if the wife does not get pregnant the man can also be tested because there are various reasons for male infertility (male's inability to cause pregnancy in a fertile female).

Overall this proposal is based on the principle that the structure of the Catholic Marriage Rite is flexible enough and general enough to integrate cultural differences in the process of African inculturation.

This is also being discussed in other parts of the world. Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Austria stated: “Cohabitation could be seen as a stage on the way to marriage.”⁷¹

One challenge is how SCCs can reach out to families and married people on the margins and periphery of society. This includes pastoral, missionary and social outreach to (alphabetically): abandoned babies, abused children, families and marriages affected by

facilitate opportunities for newly married adults beyond traditional marriage and baptism preparation.” Mike Jordon Laskey, “Three Things I'd Tell the Synod on the Family About Marriage,” National Catholic Reporter Website, retrieved on 16 October, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/young-voices/three-things-id-tell-synod-family-about-marriage>

⁶⁹ I asked a devout Catholic married woman in Iramba Parish in Musoma Diocese, Tanzania what was the happiest day of her life. She answered: “Not the day of my marriage or the day of the birth of my first child. It was the day my first born son was circumcised.” For her this symbolized that her son had passed to manhood and the continuance of the family lineage was assured. As a mother she had successfully done her part.

⁷⁰ This applies the principle of gradualism to the question of marriage. Cardinal Christoph Schönborn states: “When discussing marriage and the family, we must first of all ask ourselves why couples all over the world often cohabit nowadays without marrying. Before I evaluate this morally, I have to learn to understand why even committed Catholic couples nowadays often only gradually discover the way to the Sacrament of Marriage.” He said that recognizing that cohabiting couples may be on the way to the sacrament of marriage did not mean agreeing with cohabitation as a whole. Christa Pongratz-Lippitt, “Schönborn: The Next Synod Must Concentrate on the Realities of Family Life,” *Herder Korrespondenz*, December, 2014, NCR Website, retrieved on 10 December, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/news/global/sch-nborn-next-synod-must-concentrate-realities-family-life#.VIdlZvVMc4k.facebook>

⁷¹ Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, *The Tablet*, Vol. 268, No. 9069, 4 October, 2014, p. 1.

HIV/AIDs including AIDs orphans, homeless families, migrant families, single parents and their children and young people from broken homes. Segeja states:

SCCs are thus tasked with the responsibility to provide the needs of these vulnerable people. Perhaps this is the most challenging pastoral concern of SCCs especially today when we observe the difficult and intolerable treatment to which so many children in Africa are subjected.⁷²

SCC members have a special opportunity to minister to families and couples affected by HIV/AIDs. One concrete example is outreach to the millions of AIDs orphans in Africa. Then there is the challenge of marriage counseling to discordant couples. In a SCC how does the Marriage Counselor advise a husband or wife whose spouse has AIDs? How does unaffected partner avoid getting affected himself/herself? Should they use a condom? How does the SCC Marriage Counselor advise a faithful Catholic woman who discovers that her husband is sleeping with other women? Should she and her husband first both get an AIDs test? Should she deny marital privileges to her husband until he is promises to be faithful only to her?

These are real questions that are very complicated, sensitive and nuanced. At a certain point the SCC Marriage Counselor may have to refer the questions to a specially trained Marriage Counselor. Some of the issues to be considered: The primacy of personal conscience informed by the teachings of the church. The use of condoms in special situations. Importance of prayer for deeper discernment. Advice on a case by case basis.

SCC members also have a special opportunity to minister to families and couples in the refugee camps and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Eastern Africa.

This compassion and care for the poorest and neediest mentioned above is a special concern of Pope Francis.

Various bishops and other Catholic Church leaders in Eastern Africa are offering pastoral solutions to these challenges of family and marriage.

6. African Proverbs and Sayings Related to Family and Marriage

Another approach to this final question in the *Lineamenta* is to reflect on African proverbs and sayings related to family and marriage. Pastoral and theological insights emerge. They are used in many SCCs' contexts and situations. A full list is found in Appendix No. 22 of the Ebook -- Joseph Healey, *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*.⁷³ Some examples by three categories:

⁷² Nicholas Segeja, "Small Christian Communities: A Vital Icon," p, 27.

⁷³ On the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website at: http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build_new.pdf

- **African proverbs and sayings on family life (17)**

Home is best. (Swahili, Eastern and Central Africa).

Blood is thicker than water (many African languages).

You can only resemble the parents that gave birth to you. For a cow does not give birth to a sheep (Yoruba, Nigeria).

You only have one mother (many African languages).

A mother is the cornerstone of a family (Somali, Somalia).

A child does not laugh at the ugliness of its mother (Uganda)

The person who has not traveled widely thinks his or her mother is the only cook (the best cook) (many African languages).

*No matter how skinny, the son always belongs to his father*⁷⁴ (Galla, Ethiopia)

No matter how useless a person may seem to another, they mean the world to their family (Zulu, South Africa).

Brothers and sisters are like calabashes; even if they knock each other, they don't break (Bunyoro, Uganda).

Brotherhood and sisterhood does not mean physical resemblance but mutual assistance (Africa).

Eating together strengthen brotherhood and sisterhood (Tongo, Ghana).

When a man person walks naked it is the kinspeople who feel the shame not the naked person. (Igbo, Nigeria).

When brothers fight to death, the stranger inherits their father's estate (Igbo, Nigeria).

You must treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents. It is loaned to you by your children (Gikuyu, Kenya).

A visitor is a guest for two days. On the third day give him or her a hoe. (Swahili, Eastern and Central Africa).

Let the guest come so that the host may benefit (get well). (Swahili, Eastern and Central Africa).

These proverbs and sayings are closely linked to African values of relationships, community and unity. They touch all aspects of human life.

Blood is thicker than water is a very common African proverb found in many languages. We have to appreciate the deep African cultural values, ties and loyalties of family, clan and ethnic group. In his intervention during the First African Synod in 1994 on the tragic civil war in Rwanda Nigerian Bishop Albert Obiefuna of Awka, Nigeria explained that "when it comes to the crunch, it is not the Christian concept of the church as a family that prevails but rather the adage that *blood is thicker than water*."⁷⁵ Thus the blood of family and ethnic group in Africa is

⁷⁴ There is a Sukuma, Tanzania riddle about the importance of the father in the home under the theme "Respect for Those in Authority." The riddle says: "*You do not wipe your nose on the pillar that supports the whole house?*" The answer is: "*Parental father.*"

⁷⁵ Albert Obiefuna, "Fourth General Congregation," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 17, 1338 (April 27, 1994), p. 9.

thicker than the water of *Baptism*. Stated another way, at the core of an African's priorities and allegiances blood relationship is often more important than the church as a family, even for an African who has become a Christian. This helps to explain how horrible genocide and ethnic cleansing can take place in predominantly Christian countries such as Rwanda and Burundi and more recently in South Sudan.

The Marsabit Diocese,⁷⁶ Kenya Website states:

Ethnicity: Our region, for the last couple of years, has been deeply divided on ethnic lines to a point that sessions at deanery level, where different ethnic groups are present, have become a real problem. People identify themselves more with their tribe than with their faith. There is a tedious but obligatory journey of helping the people gain the sense of belonging to a larger Christian Family. It is urgent for the Church to find ways and means of bringing the people together.

In developing African Christianity and the integration of African values and Christian values in the family we are challenged to go further and rephrase this traditional African proverb to say *the water of Baptism is thicker than the blood of tribalism*. This can start at the grassroots level in our homes and SCCs. For the church to see itself as a Christian family is to extend the boundaries beyond the clan and ethnic group. The water of *Baptism* must be stronger than the blood of narrow clannishness and tribalism. In this process SCCs are challenged to become genuine agents of change for the transformation of society. The African theology and praxis of Church-as-Family can be one of the keys to reconciliation, peace, and unity on the continent.

- **African proverbs and sayings on raising children (12)**

The hen with baby chicks doesn't swallow the worm (Sukuma, Tanzania).

A cow never runs away from her calves. (Bemba, Zambia).

When the woman is hungry she says, "Roast something for the children so they might eat" (Akan, Ghana).

Your own child is like an axe; once it falls on you, you pick it up. It means no matter how serious the offence that your child has committed, you cannot abandon the child or for the child to cease to be your child (Bemba, Zambia).

A child's fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which its mother puts into its palm (Yoruba, Nigeria).

Who loves the mother must love the children also (Bemba, Zambia).

A child who is not taught by its mother will be taught by the world (Swahili, Eastern and Central Africa).

The person who does not listen to an elder's advice gets his or her leg broken. (Swahili, Eastern and Central Africa).

A stick is straightened while still young (many African languages).

It takes a whole village to raise a child (Igbo and Yoruba, Nigeria Proverb).

You are the child of a duck; take care of yourself (Sukuma, Tanzania).

If you think education is costly, try ignorance (Swahili, Eastern and Central Africa).

⁷⁶ Retrieved on 8 June, 2014, <http://marsabitdiocese.org/parishes.html>

African proverbs and sayings teach many values about raising children. Often the mother has the central role. Traditionally the elders' advice was very important, but this is changing especially in urban Africa.

There are many insights in the Igbo and Yoruba, Nigeria proverb *It takes a whole village to raise a child*.⁷⁷ Child upbringing is a communal effort. The responsibility for raising a child is shared with the larger family (sometimes called the extended family). Everyone in the family participates especially the older children, aunts and uncles, grandparents, and even cousins. It is not unusual for African children to stay for long periods with their grandparents or aunts or uncles. Even the wider community gets involved such as neighbors and friends. Children are considered a blessing from God for the whole community. This communal responsibility⁷⁸ in raising children is also seen in the Sukuma (Tanzania) proverb *One knee does not bring up a child* and in the Swahili (East and Central Africa) proverb *One hand does not nurse a child*.

This African proverb can be effectively used during infant baptism. It is the whole extended family that has the responsibility of raising the child in the Catholic faith especially the parents and godparents but also the other siblings, aunts and uncles, grandparents and the whole SCC at times. This includes the spirit and practice of pastoral accompaniment.

In general this Nigerian proverb conveys the African worldview that emphasizes the values of family relationships, parenting, parental care, self-sacrificing concern for others, sharing and even hospitality. This is very close to the Biblical worldview as seen in scripture texts related to unity and cooperation (*Ecclesiastes 4:9,12*) and a mother's self-sacrificing love (*Isaiah 49:15-16*).

American politician Hillary Clinton is not the only person who has made this Nigerian proverb popular. In a "Church for Schools" day to support Catholic education in St. Peter's Square, Vatican City on 10 May, 2014 Pope Francis emphasized that family, school and Catholic community go hand in hand and said: "This makes me think of an African proverb which says: *It takes a village to raise a child*. Let us all say it together: *It takes a village to raise a child*. All together: *It takes a village to raise a child*." Inviting the audience or congregation to repeat the proverb is a very African style of communications.

A commentator stated:

Now surely the Pope was meaning to underscore the need for Catholic community in assisting parents to raise children. And that truth needs reinforcing today more than ever. As many growing families in cities in the Western world

⁷⁷ A full explanation can be found on the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved on 16 May, 2014, <http://afriprov.org/index.php/african-proverb-of-the-month/23-1998proverbs/137-november-1998-proverb.html>

⁷⁸ The plan of religious education in the USA uses the term "whole community catechesis."

have found, raising morally healthy children in a secular anti-Christian culture is very challenging. Finding and maintaining a Christian community is essential for good friendships for children, for reinforcing faith and morals, and for giving parents the peers and encouragement they need to continue to go against the tide in raising their children to know, love, and serve God.⁷⁹

Thus in the pope's interpretation of this proverb the village and other local communities supports the parents. The SCC is one of the places where this can happen. The SCC is the church in the neighborhood and closely connected to the local network of clans and families. SCC members are agents of pastoral life, catechetical instructions and evangelization in promoting family life, parenting and family values. Another interpretation of this proverb that the church does not agree with is that the parents and families' help in raising children is insignificant and that more authority should be given to the government and other outside institutions.

- **African proverbs and sayings on marriage ministry/marriage preparation/marriage counseling (14)**

Marriage is like a peanut/groundnut; you have to crack it to see what is inside (Akan, Ghana).

Marriage is like a book; every page/day is a new lesson (Ewe, Ghana).

*Marriage is the main post of the hut.*⁸⁰

My beloved (Swahili, Eastern and Central Africa).

The journey of marriage is far, far (Ashante, Ghana).

No matter how beautiful is your sister, you cannot marry her (Bemba, Zambia).

The house that is built well (like a fixed faith) doesn't move any longer (Lwalu, Democratic Republic of the Congo – DRC).

A single person cannot counsel a married couple (Luo, Kenya and Tanzania)

⁷⁹ John-Henry Westen, "It Takes a Village to Raise a Child': Did Pope Francis quote Hillary Clinton?" LifeSiteNews Website, retrieved on 14 May 2014,

<http://www.lifesitenews.com/blog/it-takes-a-village-to-raise-a-child-did-pope-francis-quote-hillary-clinton>

⁸⁰ "'Marriage,' says an African proverb, is the main post of the hut.' If the house, that is, the Church of Christ in Africa, should sway, perhaps that is because its main support does not plunge deep enough into the earth of Africa. There is a great number of Catholics excluded from the sacraments, the source of unity and strength, by reason of their irregular marital situation. Still others are barred from coming into the Church by reason of already existing relationships. It is good that all of these problems should be treated so as to find out what pastoral solutions are possible." No. 68 of *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Synod of Bishops First Special Assembly for Africa, *The Church in Africa and Her Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000: "You Shall Be My Witnesses" (Acts 1:8)*, Vatican: Liberia Editrice and Nairobi Paulines Publications Africa, 1993.

An uncircumcised person can never advise a circumcised person (concerning adulthood including marriage) (Gikuyu, Kenya).

The hoes of two people cultivating together in a field sometimes clash (hit) against each other (Sukuma, Tanzania).

Hoes that dig together never miss to knock at one another (Swahili, Eastern and Central Africa).

Two calabashes in a basin of water will by all means touch each other but not break each other. (Ewe, Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria).

Until the nagging wife marries the second husband, she will not know the value of the first one (Igbo, Nigeria).

The electric wires are still live (a warning not to play with the "live wires" of AIDS because they are packed with enough "voltage" to kill). (Swahili, Eastern and Central Africa).

Better a still curtain than a flag blowing in the wind (Swahili, Eastern and Central Africa).

Marriage is basic to African society, but there are many different traditions and customs depending on the local context and situation.

Concerning the Sukuma proverb above – *The hoes of two people cultivating together in a field sometimes clash (hit) against each other*.⁸¹ The Sukuma Ethnic Group is the largest ethnic group (more than six million people) in Tanzania and lives mainly in rural areas in the northwestern part of the country on or near the southern shores of Lake Victoria – mainly in the Mwanza and Shinyanga Regions. The Sukuma are agricultural-pastoralists whose lives focus on farming (maize, sorghum, cassava, sweet potatoes, cotton, etc.) and herding cows. The hoes of two people weeding together in their fields sometimes clash (hit) against each other as seen in this Sukuma proverb. This proverb is applied to married people living in close proximity. They experience misunderstandings and differences at times. This is part of daily life. The proverb is used during Wedding Masses to encourage the newly married couple to persevere in bad times and difficult situations. When marital problems occur, it is used in marriage counseling.

Concerning the Lwalu proverb above -- *The house that is built well (like a fixed faith) doesn't move any longer*. The African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website states:

This is a proverb used in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in the daily life of married people that praises them for not having the spirit of divorce. The faith union of the Catholic couple is sacramentalized and there is no question of divorce. When a couple marries, the man and woman should live together and try always to feel happy. When a person builds his or house solidly it should remain forever. Before the construction of a house, the cost estimate should be evaluated so that the person has sufficient money to finish. This is true in marriage where commitment is the foundation that makes the husband and wife want to persevere together until they die. The demolition of a house is connected to its expansion or improvement and not to its total destruction. Faith finishes

⁸¹ A full explanation can be found on the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved on 16 May, 2014, <http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-proverb-of-the-month/57-2014-african-proverb-of-the-month/664-february-2014-the-hoes-of-two-people-cultivating-together-in-a-field-sometimes-clash-hit-against-each-other-sukuma-tanzania-proverb.html>

building a house. It is fixed to continue into its old age. This imitates the marriage contract. Aging in marriage with his or her partner is desirable for the family. Building a permanent home is desirable for the family.

In this Lwalu proverb we learn to respect marriage as a permanent alliance. For example, when we say that something is permanent or mandatory, we say that it is “set in stone” such as referring to the Ten Commandments tablets prescribed by God originally. Marriage is a foundational sacrament so the marriage is “set in stone.” And this stone supports the home.⁸²

7. Small Christian Communities in the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the 2014 Synod of Bishops

The *Instrumentum Laboris* (Latin for “Working Document”)⁸³ for the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on “The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization” was published in the Vatican on 26 June, 2014. The working document notes that many responses were “submitted by the synods of the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris* (Latin phrase which literally means "of one's own right"), the episcopal conferences, the departments of the Roman Curia and the Union of Superiors General. In addition, other responses — categorized as *observations* — were sent directly to the General Secretariat by a significant number of dioceses, parishes, movements, groups,⁸⁴ ecclesial associations and families, not to mention academic institutions, specialists, both Catholic and non-Catholic, all interested in sharing their reflections.” Cardinal Baldisseri, Secretary of the

⁸² Laur Mwepu, “June, 2014 African Proverb of the Month,” African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved 6 June, 2014, <http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-proverb-of-the-month/57-2014-african-proverb-of-the-month/682-june-2014-the-house-that-is-built-well-like-a-fixed-faith-doesnt-move-any-longer-lwalu-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-drc-proverb.html>

⁸³ There have different responses to this document. The 30 July, 2014 issue of *National Catholic Reporter* has an Editorial (“Obstacles Riddle Synod on the Family's Path”) and two essays. The Editor's note states: “The 50-page *Instrumentum Laboris*, or working document, that was released 26 June and will guide the discussion during the October Synod of Bishops on the family was dry and impersonal, lifeless almost, and that confounded us at NCR. From personal experience and from listening to colleagues, readers and friends, we have experienced marriage and family life as life-giving and joyous. Marriage and family life is not without its challenges and struggles; it offers ample lessons in humility and forgiveness, but that, too, at the best of times can be nurturing. If the writers of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, which is now supposed to be being studied in dioceses throughout the world, had begun with the fundamental experience of people who have lived in marriages and raised families, we wondered, how different would it have been?” See National Catholic Reporter Website, retrieved on 31 July, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/editorial-obstacles-riddle-synod-familys-path>

⁸⁴ The wide variety of names used shows both the richness and complexity of the English language in describing the “small community” or “small group” phenomenon under which SCCs fit.

Synod of Bishops explained that intervening in the Extraordinary Synod will be 23 lay auditors, seven of whom will be married couples, one of whom will render its testimony during the Synodal sessions.

The document highlights both the pastoral challenges and concrete examples of pastoral care of the family and marriage. It has 26 references to “community” and 10 references to “communities” that are used in different senses: Christian community, church community, ecclesial community, faith community, local community, new community and parish community. Three pertinent sections are:

No. 48 under “The Family and Integral Development” states:

The responses mention the significance of the close collaboration of families/homes and the parish in the mission of evangelization, as well as the need for the active involvement of the family in parish life through support and solidarity on behalf of other families. In this regard, invaluable assistance comes from the community made up of families. Membership in movements and associations can also be a particularly significant source of support.

COMMENTARY

While the expression “the community made up of families” is more general, this is an exact description of Eastern Africa SCCs that are called “a communion of families.” This is part of the “Communion of Communities Model of Church” that is explained at length in other parts of this Ebook. “Movements and associations” cover a wide variety of small communities and small groups. Some Catholics continue to place SCCs in these two categories although they are different theologically.

No. 54 under “Marriage Preparation” states:

Many laudable initiatives in marriage preparation are taking place in various parts of the world, including: “new communities” which promote retreats; personal encounters; groups for prayer, reflection and discussion.

COMMENTARY

What is missing in the document and very important for the AMECEA Region is that Eastern African SCCs have a specific ministry for marriage and a specific minister for marriage preparation called the Marriage Animator or Marriage Counselor. This person is responsible for coordinating the marriage preparation of couples and counseling married couples in the SCC.

No. 146 under “The Response of the Particular Churches”⁸⁵ states:

⁸⁵ No. 58 under “Support for Familial Spirituality” uses diocese, Particular Church and Local Church interchangeably and states: “Clearly, Local Churches should be able to find that this richness is a real resource for not only promoting various initiatives on behalf of couples intending marriage but devising ways to provide suitable pastoral care for families today.

When parents, usually after an absence from the church for some time, request from the ecclesial community the sacramental preparation of their children, the most recommended approach in all the responses is to readily accept them without making any distinctions. Receiving them with a basic attitude of respect, a friendly disposition and a willingness to listen to their human and spiritual needs creates a proper and beneficial atmosphere for communicating the Gospel message. The important and effective ecclesial experiences aimed at assisting parents along the way include: catechesis in the family and community; the ecclesial movements in support of the pastoral care of married couples; Sunday Masses; family visits; prayer groups; popular missions; the activities of Basic Christian Communities; groups of *Bible* study; the pastoral activities of ecclesial movements.

COMMENTARY

While the questionnaire's responses from around the world lump BCCs or SCCs together with a variety of pastoral options to help the sacramental preparation of children, the Eastern Africa experience of SCCs as a key pastoral priority and a new way of being church is significantly different. Unfortunately the *Instrumentum Laboris* doesn't reflect the basis insight of the Eastern Africa experience – that parish-based SCCs are a primary means and “place” for family catechesis, marriage catechesis, family life apostolate, religious education, pastoral care and evangelization.

At the same time the document emphasizes various pastoral activities and methods for marriage preparation and catechesis such as “older and more experienced couples act as “godparents” to younger couples who are preparing for marriage” (No. 56). In Eastern Africa often these pastoral activities and methods take place in the SCCs and are carried out by SCCs members.

The day after it was published this *Instrumentum Laboris* was presented during in the AMECEA Pastoral Department Workshop for National Commissions for Marriage and Family Life Apostolate in the AMECEA Region that took place in Nairobi in June, 2014. The theme of the workshop was “Marriage and Family Life” – a Preparation for the Synod of Bishops III Extraordinary General Assembly.”

The presentation on “How SCCs Are an Important Part of the Pastoral Care of the Family and Marriage in Evangelization in Eastern Africa” began with all the participants receiving a bookmark with the map of Eastern Africa that celebrates the 180,000 SCCs in the nine AMECEA countries.⁸⁶ The bookmark mentions the Small Christian Communities Global

⁸⁶ During a discussion of the delegates from Kampala Archdiocese, Arua Diocese and Kiyinda-Mityana Diocese it was pointed out that the success of SCCs in Uganda is uneven. There is no “uniform” experience. Arua Diocese has the best overall SCC plan. The *Bible* is used in some youth groups and not in others.

Collaborative Website and “Facebook Page” (www.smallchristiancommunities.org) that has an Ebook on “SCCs in Eastern Africa” and many online SCCs resources.⁸⁷

We can be grateful for the special pastoral experience and activities of parish-based SCCs that are a key pastoral priority in the AMECEA Region. This is seen in the light of the People of God and Communion Ecclesiology that developed after Vatican Two and the African cultural priorities of communion, solidarity, relationships and family values. SCCs are a new way of being church from the bottom up/from the grassroots up. A SCC is a communion of families. An outstation is a communion of SCCs. A parish is a communion of outstations. And so on.

SCCs are the “place” of much pastoral care and the SCC members themselves are the “agents” of pastoral ministry and evangelization. Cardinal Polycarp Pengo of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania calls SCCs in Swahili *chombo mahususi cha uinjilishaji* that can be translated as “a special or privileged instrument or means of evangelization.” Related to our topic SCCs in Eastern Africa have two important lay ministries:

1. Religious Education/Catechesis Animator (for youth and children).
2. Marriage Animator or Marriage Counselor
 - a. Helping young couples sacramentalize their marriages.
 - a. Counseling couples with marital difficulties.

The two meanings of the Eucharist Famine in Africa were explained.

8. Small Christian Communities in the *Final Report and Message of the 2014 Synod of Bishops*

The methodology of the Third Extraordinary Synod was the "See," "Judge" and "Act" process as follows:"

1. The interventions (written interventions submitted a head of time and oral interventions presented during the sessions) were organized around the eight (8) topics listed in the *Instrumentum Laboris*.
2. Each topic was introduced by an "auditor/auditrice" (mainly married couples) with focus on personal experiences,⁸⁸ then sharings by the bishops or any other delegates

⁸⁷ This includes online SCCs that appeal especially to youth. During a discussion on the importance of the *Bible* it was mentioned that young people use an electronic *Bible* on their smartphones rather than a paper *Bible*. A Zambian Sister said, “But the youth should still bring their *Bibles* to the SCC Meetings.” Another person commented, “But they do – on their smartphones.” Electronic devices and the internet require a new way of thinking.

⁸⁸ These couples spoke of the deep joy they had experienced in their marriages and family lives – as well as the difficulties they had overcome and the struggles they had faced.

for not more than four minutes (“See” – by listening to the actual experiences of members of the Family of God especially married couples).

3. Then the bishops made their interventions⁸⁹ on the given topic after having listened to the life experiences (“Judge” – by reflecting on the Teachings of the Sacred Scripture and Magisterium with regard to the topic being discussed).
4. In small groups, the bishops discussed and proposed pastoral responses to the given topic (“Act” – by offering the pastoral guidelines in the light of the teachings of the Church and with consideration of the actual situation).

Many commentators have emphasized the fact that the bishops and cardinals publicly disagreed with one another in their attempt to discern what is good for the church. The Catholic Church really has not had this experience since the open debates of the Second Vatican Council. The pope himself supported this open discussion. This is an on-going process of listening, discussion,⁹⁰ dialogue, debate, discernment and proposed pastoral responses leading up to the Synod of Bishops Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly to take place in Rome from 4-25 October, 2015. The pope likes to call this process a journey or a path -- in the spirit of the meaning of the word “synod.” “Synodality is the path of the Catholic Church.”⁹¹ This process of synodality is a journeying together.⁹² The Pope often refers to the model of synodality in the Orthodox Churches. He emphasizes, “The synod is not a parliament, it’s a protected ecclesial space. And this protection exists so (that) the Holy Spirit can work.”⁹³

Pope Francis says that he is open to changing Catholic Church regulations and practices (NOT doctrine) for pastoral reasons, that is, finding a “pastoral solution.” He says if there is a consensus of the recommendations of bishops on the local level (for

⁸⁹ During this meeting Cardinal Berhaneyesus Souraphiel presented his important intervention on behalf of AMECEA that is referred to above.

⁹⁰ See the creativity of St. Paul Inside the Walls Madison, New Jersey, USA)’s Young Adult Fireside Chat: Open discussion for young adults that welcomes opposing viewpoints on the great moral issues of our day.

⁹¹ Francis, “Homily on 29 June, 2013,” America Website, retrieved on 2 February, 2015, <http://americamagazine.org/content/dispatches/pope-decides-pallium-will-be-given-metropolitan-archbishops-home-dioceses>

⁹² There are many relevant metaphors. The Story of “The Road to Emmaus” in *Luke* 24. The famous African proverb: *If you want to walk fast walk alone. If you want to walk far walk together.*

⁹³ “Pope Francis Speaks Up on Synod Process – 'It Isn't Over,’” *Catholic News Agency* (CNA), 30 November, 2014, retrieved on 2 December, 2014, <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-francis-speaks-up-on-synod-process-it-isnt-over-37950/>

example, a national or regional episcopal conference) on a particular pastoral issue, change is possible in the context of a process of subsidiarity (decentralization) and collegiality.⁹⁴

The two-week synod in the Vatican produced two major documents on 18 October, 2014 – the *Final Report of the Synod (Relatio Synodi) of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: "The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization" (5-19 October 2014)* and the *Message of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops* – and many supporting documents. These official documents highlight both the pastoral challenges and the concrete examples of pastoral care of the family and marriage.

There are many references to “community” and “communities” (or their equivalents marked in **bold**) in these October, 2014 synod documents that are used in different senses (alphabetically):

church community(ies)

community(ies) of believing families

community(ies) of faith or faith community(ies)

community(ies) of the faithful

community(ies) who accompany couples and families and care for their wounds

ecclesial community(ies)

entire community: “The complex social reality and the changes affecting the family today require a greater effort on the part of the whole Christian community in preparing those who are about to be married. The importance of the virtues needs to be included, among these chastity which is invaluable in the genuine growth of love between persons. In this regard, the synod fathers jointly insisted on the need to involve more extensively the entire community by favoring the witness of families themselves and including preparation for marriage in the course of Christian Initiation as well as emphasizing the connection between marriage and the other sacraments. Likewise, they felt that specific programs were needed in preparing couples for marriage, programs which create a true experience of participation in ecclesial life and thoroughly treat the various aspects of family life (Number 39 – “Guiding Engaged Couples in Their Preparation for Marriage” -- in the *Final Report of the Third Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the Family*)

PROPOSED ACTION: Lengthen and deepen the pre-marital catechesis. Beginning and advanced training programs for married couple accompaniers (mentor couples) and other facilitators/ formators/presenters/ trainers. Emphasize Train the Trainers (TOT) Workshops for parishes, schools and marriage programs. Engaged couples SCCs are both a faith sharing group

⁹⁴ [In an interview with the author at Georgetown University on 9 October, 2014, Father Ladislaus Orsy, SJ confirmed that](#) “affective collegiality” involves a consultative process by the world bishops while “effective collegiality” is involves a deliberative process (decision-making that includes voting to reach a consensus). Francis wants national bishops’ conferences to be more involved in the collegial process and ideally present a consensus view on a particular pastoral topic from the grassroots level. The Holy Spirit works through the consensus of these local bishops.

and a support group. Married couple accompaniers are called upon when needed. This overall approach would insure that the engaged couple not focus too much on the celebration and social aspects of their wedding only. One concrete suggestion:

Parishes could encourage couples to go to marriage preparation weekends before any formal preparation takes place in the parish. They can initiate small groups for the married to meet in their own homes and provide resources that will enable them to discuss how to deepen their relationship with their spouse and with God. These could include exercises, reflections and discussions on weekly Scripture readings for Sunday Mass. One such resource is *I Am With You*, a trilogy of books covering the three liturgical years.⁹⁵

family is the core of parish communities: “Family is thus an authentic domestic church that expands to become the family of families that is the ecclesial community” (*Message of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*)

local church community(ies)

local community(ies)

new communities: “The initial years of marriage are a vital and sensitive period during which couples become more aware of the challenges and meaning of married life. Consequently, pastoral accompaniment needs to go beyond the actual celebration of the Sacrament (*Familiaris Consortio*, Part III). In this regard, experienced couples are of great importance in any pastoral activity. The parish is the ideal place for these experienced couples to be of service to younger couples, with the possible cooperation of associations, ecclesial movements⁹⁶ and new communities.⁹⁷ Married couples need encouragement in a basic openness to the great gift of

⁹⁵ Brian and Maureen Devine, “What Marriage is About,” *Tablet*, 6 December, 2014, retrieved on 6 December, 2014, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/parish-practice/6/4081/what-marriage-is-about>

⁹⁶ “Ecclesial movements” and “church movements” are used interchangeably.

⁹⁷ Another English translation is: “with the possible involvement of associations, church movement and new communities.” The official Italian text of this sentence is: “La parrocchia è considerata come il luogo dove coppie esperte possono essere messe a disposizione di quelle più giovani, con l’eventuale concorso di associazioni, movimenti ecclesiali e nuove comunità.”

In the AMECEA Region in general the Catholic Church see the various associations, ecclesial (church) movements and new communities connected to marriage such as Couples for Christ, Engaged Encounter, Faithful House (FTH) Program, Family Life Ministries, Holy Cross Family Ministry, Marriage Care, Marriage Encounter, Marriage Preparation (Marriage Prep), Pre-Cana, Pro-Life, Retrouvaille, SCCs, Teams of Our Lady, other Christian Family Movements and their various centers and institutes as an important assistance and a big help to the parish. The Catholic Church continue to offer a range of formation opportunities and approaches. There is not a single program/one size fits all approach.

While some priests might see these groups as “sheep stealers” (setting up separate exclusive groups of married couples outside the parish structure), most priests and pastoral agents welcome and depend on these specialized groups in marriage ministry within the parish

children. Emphasis on the importance of a familial spirituality and prayer life should lead couples to meet regularly to promote growth in their spiritual life and solidarity in the concrete demands of life. Meaningful liturgies, devotional practices and the Eucharist celebrated for entire families were mentioned as vital factors in fostering evangelization through the family” (Number 39 – “Accompanying the Married Couple in the Initial Years of Marriage” – in the *Final Report of the Third Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the Family*).

A key text is “with the possible cooperation of associations, ecclesial movements and new communities.” Parish-based SCCs are included here. There is a wide range of pastoral possibilities.

PROPOSED ACTION: Lengthen and deepen the post-marital catechesis. Beginning and advanced training programs for married couple accompaniers (mentor couples) and other facilitators/formators/presenters/trainers. Emphasize Train the Trainers (TOT) Workshops for parishes, schools and marriage programs. Newly married couples SCCs that are both a faith sharing group and a support group. Married couple accompaniers are called upon when needed.⁹⁸

parish as the family of families

small activist units

vibrant communities: “Vibrant communities exist in parish composed of married couples or entire families who meet regularly, pray together, study and thoroughly discuss the *Catechism of the Church*, read the *Bible* and talk about everyday problems, difficulties and the beauty of life lived in common by couples and treat questions concerning the upbringing of their children. In other words, they strive to combine faith with life. They help each other in times of illness, unemployment or other problems. Many of them participate in the work of *Caritas*. Many help in the preparation of engaged couples for marriage in strengthening their relationship of friendship which is to endure long after their wedding. Groups of young Catholic mothers with young children also accommodate mothers without any religious affiliation or non-believers, thus creating a new form of mission. Families are forming various new communities which assist couples in crisis or help women in existential or psychological difficulty” (Number 2 – “The Gospel of the Family and Family Ministry” -- in the *Report Preceding the Discussion at the Third Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the Family*).

PROPOSED ACTION: Special outreach programs beginning with listening, accompanying, walking with before teaching (the Emmaus model).

structure. So the best translation of *concorso* has the contextual meaning of cooperation/collaboration/involvement/assistance/a running along with/with the help of.

⁹⁸ *I Am With You* is a trilogy of books that reflect on the readings at mass for years A, B, and C. They are a new approach to Scripture for married people. They will help them to understand the key messages in the Sunday readings. They include witty illustrations and a prayer for the couple. Website: <http://www.twoinoneflesh.org.uk/> *Marriage Matters* is a Word.doc Book, a weekly 60 word snippet adapted from the reflections on the Sunday Mass Scripture readings in the *I Am With You* series.

welcoming community(ies)

COMMENTARY

While the term “Small Christian Communities” is not mentioned specifically in these documents, their life and ministry is definitely described in the examples above. The synod has inspired SCC members and others to become more active in promoting Catholic family life and spirituality in Africa and everywhere. Some concrete examples:

- Experienced SCC couples should pastorally accompany engaged couples.

- Experienced SCC couples should pastorally accompany young married couples.⁹⁹ SCC members should accompany families and couples who are wounded and on the periphery. This is the Ministry of Compassionate Accompaniment. This includes mercy toward broken and fragile families and couples. There should be special outreach programs beginning with listening, accompanying, walking with before teaching (the Emmaus model). See Numbers 2, 8, 28 and 45 of the *Final Report of the Third Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the Family*.

This also includes the important pastoral and missionary outreach of SCCs. In a pastoral metaphor Pope Francis has called the Catholic Church a field hospital after battle. German Cardinal Walter Kaspar extended this metaphor to say that “the family too is a field hospital where it is necessary to bind many wounds.” We can extend this metaphor even further to say that the Small Christian Community as a Domestic Church is also a field hospital called to reach out to needy families, broken homes, to the homeless and to those people Pope Francis calls “the margined and those on the periphery of society.”

⁹⁹ Eastern African SCCs can learn from Bishop Mario Grech of Gozo Diocese, Malta and president of the Maltese Episcopal Conference how the Gozo diocesan pastoral plan of families was restructured in order to be more effective in accompanying courting couples and the families of today.

In the synod we often spoke about the importance of proposing a pastoral journey that helps couples before and after marriage. In Gozo we propose a journey of marriage preparation lasting two years. During this course a priest and married couples accompany the courting couples so that their love matures humanly and spiritually while preparing for the sacrament of marriage. There is also the proposal of a catechetical accompaniment for young married couples, especially during the first five years of married life, that helps them to build their marriage on the gospel. The Diocesan Family Commission also offers journeys of faith for cohabitating, separated, and divorced remarried couples.

Mario Grech, “Bishop Grech: ‘There Is a Need for Spreading the Gospel of the Family:’ President of the Maltese Episcopal Conference Discusses Aspects Emanating From Synod on the Family, *ZENIT: The World Seen from Rome Daily Dispatch*, 28 October 2014, p. 19.

- In parishes together with various lay movements SCC members should be united to families and to work with them to promote the living of the “Gospel of the family” in homes. See No. 2 of the *Final Report of the Third Extraordinary Synod*.
- SCCs should encourage Catholic men to organize themselves into groups, associations, or even small activist units dedicated to stopping the scourge of abuse in the home and in society.

In summary: Pope Francis’ challenge to all Catholics to “evangelize the peripheries and the marginated” is a special call. He explains: “Jesus renewed his call to each one of us to become his missionary disciples. May we perceive this call as the most important thing in our lives and share this gift with others, those near and far, even to the distant geographical and existential peripheries¹⁰⁰ of our world.”¹⁰¹ No. 20 of *The Joy of the Gospel* states: “All of us are asked to obey the Lord’s call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel.” This is part of the shift in mission being existential/situational as well as geographical/territorial. No. 120 states: “In virtue of their Baptism all members of the People of God have become missionary disciples.

Specialists continue to study the complex social and cultural reality of our contemporary world. In the follow-down to the Third Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in Rome in October, 2014 on Family and Marriage it was proposed to emphasis SCCs composed of the following specialized groups:

- Youth (Generation Y 18-22 year olds)
- Young Adults (Generation Y 23-35 year olds)
- Engaged Couples
- Newly married Couples
- Married Couples with Little Children

These small communities would combine lectionary-based faith sharing and being a support group. The engaged couples and newly married couples could consult married couple accompaniers (mentor couples) when necessary.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ These existential peripheries and margins are people and situations in pain and suffering.

¹⁰¹ Pope Francis, “Message of Pope Francis for the Twenty-Ninth World Youth Day” (Palm Sunday, 13 April 2014), *Catholic Information Service for Africa (CISA) Email News Bulletin*. Issue No. 30, 11 April, 2013.

¹⁰² Taken from Joseph Healey, “What Is The Way Forward? Where Do We Go From Here? Some Reflections on the Evangelizing Ministry of St. Paul Inside the Walls in Preparing for the Synod of Bishops Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly on the “The Vocation

Indian psychologist and writer Father Sahaya Selvam, SDB explains that the *Final Report of the Third Extraordinary Synod*

follows an adapted rendering of the See-Judge-Act formula which, in the recent decades, has become more used in pastoral reflection in the Catholic Church. The method is also referred to as the Pastoral Cycle. In the present document, seeing or listening consisted in openly perceiving and understanding the prevailing situation regarding marriage and family life in the world today...Almost every plenary session of the synod began with narratives from the [married] couples. They shared their commitment to the truth of the teaching of the church regarding marriage and family, but also brought to the attention of the clerics at the synod the struggles that accompany the commitment.” The stage of making judgment was led by the scripture and the Tradition of the Church. And, finally, a way forward has been proposed in pastoral accompaniment of the faithful.¹⁰³

This process also called the Pastoral Spiral is described many times in this article as the process of Eastern Africa SCCs.

The *Final Report of the Third Extraordinary Synod* serves as the *Lineamenta (Guidelines)* on the theme of "The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World." A new preparatory document based on this final document and containing "a series of main points to lead the discussions and to help in its reception and deepening" with 46 questions was sent to the world's bishops conferences at the beginning of December, 2014

The year between the synods "should take the path already done as a starting point and take this special opportunity to study issues and promote discussion at the level of Episcopal Conferences, finding the means and the tools necessary to further involve also the different ecclesial bodies in the synodal reflection on the family."

and Mission of the Family in the Church and the Modern World" in Rome from 4-25 October, 2015 in the Spirit and Vision of Pope Francis.” Madison, New Jersey: Unpublished Paper, 6 December, 2014. 6 pages. Under the “United States of America” under “North America” on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website at:

http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/inside_the_wall.pdf

¹⁰³ Sahaya Selvam, “Bishops Integrate Truth and Mercy in Debate on Divorce and Homosexuals, *Daily Nation* Website, retrieved on 26 October, 2014, <http://mobile.nation.co.ke/lifestyle/CATHOLIC-Bishops-integrate-truth-and-mercy-in-debatE/-/1950774/2499484/-/format/xhtml/-/g1lakl/-/index.html>

Hopefully Eastern African SCCs will participate in this ongoing process of listening, discussion, debate, discernment and proposed pastoral responses.¹⁰⁴ The answers to the 46 questions will be sent to Rome by 15 April, 2015 and will be collated to produce the *Instrumentum Laboris (Working Document)* (to be ready by June, 2015) for the Synod of Bishops XIV Ordinary General Assembly to take place in Rome from 4-25 October, 2015.

It was pointed out that Africa has unique challenges and concerns (for example, polygamy, the influence of widespread poverty, economic injustice, war on family life, frozen ideas of culture and tradition usually rooted in powerful patriarchal hierarchies, etc.) and these issues will be addressed more at the October, 2015 synod.

At the same time it was emphasized that Africa is coming of age and that the African bishops at the October, 2014 synod had staked their claim to a say in the Catholic Church's teachings.¹⁰⁵ An Editorial in *America Magazine* states:

This is a dialogue that must include other voices that have been subdued in the past. The more confident presence of African bishops should be welcomed. In fact, the vibrant participation of representatives from all the fast-growing parts of the Catholic world needs to be encouraged.¹⁰⁶

John Allen adds:

¹⁰⁴ The Catholic Church in England and Wales has launched a wide-ranging consultation of parishes and clergy ahead of next year's Synod on the Family. There is a period of spiritual reflection in each parish, and separately to hear the experiences of clergy, on the main "pastoral challenges" they encounter with families. Material was sent out to parishes and clergy after Christmas. The period of reflection will go on until June or July ahead of the synod in October, 2015. It is not so much a request for opinions as a request for testimony. The two great features of the Third Extraordinary Synod in October, 2014 were: On the one hand a resounding trumpet call in support of marriage and stability of family life. On the other hand an opportunity to express and strengthen the pastoral response of the Church in a wide variety of difficult and pressurised situations. The material sent out has this same balance. The results of this consultation will be made public.

Summarized from Christopher Lamb, "English and Welsh Bishops Call for Priests and Parishes To Make Voices Heard Ahead of Next Family Synod," Tablet Website, 14 November 2014. Retrieved on 18 November, 2014, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/1396/0/english-and-welsh-bishops-call-for-priests-and-parishes-to-make-voices-heard-ahead-of-next-family-synod>

¹⁰⁵ See Tina Beattie, "After the Synod – A Journey into the Unknown," "Marginal Musings: Tina Beattie's Intermittent Reflections," retrieved on 25 October, 2014, <http://tina-beattie.blogspot.co.uk>

¹⁰⁶ "Editorial: Go in Peace," *America*, Vol. 211, No. 12 (10 November, 2014), p. 5, America Website, retrieved on 15 November, 2014, <http://americamagazine.org/issue/go-peace>

The upshot is that Africa has emerged as a genuine force in Catholic conversation, and Westerners need to get used to establishing trust before real dialogue can begin... In today's Catholic Church, Africans have both the numbers and the self-confidence to back up their concerns... If you want to get anything done in 21st century Catholicism, in other words, one great tip is to involve Africans early and often.¹⁰⁷

During the next year the Eastern Africa SCCs can learn from the small group model or small parish discussion group model in Europe and North America:

The cardinal archbishop of Paris, France André Vingt-Trois, one of the president-delegates at the October meeting, revealed that in preparation for the 2014 synod he had set up small groups (around a dozen people in each group) in every parish throughout his archdiocese to discuss the themes that were on the agenda for that synod. "I will now do the same in preparation for the 2015 synod," he told a press conference in the Vatican.

Cardinal Péter Erdö (Hungary), who had the key role of relator at the 2014 synod, said he had done something similar in preparation for that gathering. He had groups of married couples in almost every parish in his Budapest archdiocese whom he asked to discuss the themes for the recently concluded assembly. He plans to do likewise for the next one.¹⁰⁸

9. Small Christian Communities in the Answers to the 46 Questions in the *Lineamenta* of the 2015 Synod of Bishops

Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, wrote:

Accompanying this letter, which is being sent to episcopal conferences, the synods of the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris*, the Union of Superiors General and the Roman Curia, is a copy of the *Lineamenta* (http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20141209_lineamenta-xiv-assembly_en.html) composed of the *Relatio Synodi* and a series of questions on the reaction to this synodal document and a thorough examination of

¹⁰⁷ John Allen, "In 21st Century Catholicism, You Can't Ignore Africa Any More," Crux Website, retrieved on 20 November, 2014, http://www.cruxnow.com/church/2014/11/20/in-21st-century-catholicism-you-cant-ignore-africa-any-more/?s_campaign=crux:email:daily

¹⁰⁸ Gerald O'Connell, "Looking to the 2015 Synod," *America*, Vol. 211, No. 13 (3 November, 2014), p. 24, America Website, retrieved on 13 November, 2014, <http://americamagazine.org/issue/looking-2015-synod>

its contents, in the process of continuing the synodal journey already begun and in drafting the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the next synodal assembly.

The previously mentioned ecclesial entities are asked to choose a suitable manner to engage all components of the particular churches and academic institutions, organizations, lay movements and other ecclesial associations in an ample consultation of the People of God on the family, within the framework of the synodal process. Once this consultation is completed on the local level, the same ecclesial entities are to submit a summary of the results to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops by Easter, 15 April 2015.

Consequently, I ask Your Eminence/Excellency to send this document to dioceses with the request that it be widely circulated in deaneries and parishes so as to obtain the input of all components of the People of God in the preparation of the *Instrumentum Laboris*.¹⁰⁹

The Introduction to Part III – “Confronting the Situation: Pastoral Perspectives” states:

In examining Part III of the *Relatio Synodi*, it is important to be guided by the pastoral approach initiated at the Extraordinary Synod which is grounded in Vatican II and the Magisterium of Pope Francis. The episcopal conferences have the responsibility to continue to examine this part thoroughly and seek the involvement, in the most opportune manner possible, all levels of the local Church, thus providing concrete instances from their specific situations. Every effort should be made not to begin anew, but to continue on the path undertaken in the Extraordinary Synod as a point of departure.

COMMENTARY

This statement clearly shows the process and methodology of the two synods.¹¹⁰ The synods emphasize the importance of the documents of the Second Vatican Council

¹⁰⁹ Lorenzo Baldisseri, “Letter of the Secretary General to the Episcopal Conferences Accompanying the Lineamenta of XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops,” 12 December 2014, Vatican Website, retrieved on 20 December, 2014, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20141212_lineamenta-xiv-assembly_en.html

¹¹⁰ The Editorial in the 30 December 2014 issue of the *National Catholic Reporter* states:

Perhaps Francis' greatest contribution as pope will be his embrace and advocacy for the Synod of Bishops as central to the governance and mission of the church. The two synods that Francis has called to discuss family life may result in changes in pastoral practices that will welcome Catholics back into full participation in the church, but the process the synods begin may well be their most important outcome. Francis is making of the synod what Pope Paul VI

and Pope Francis' *The Joy of the Gospel*. Francis is reopening the lifelines to Vatican II as the blueprint for his own vision and programs of renewal. He draws more on the theology of Pope Paul VI than St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. He encourages concrete examples from specific pastoral situations.

While the term "Small Christian Communities" is not mentioned specifically in these questions, their life and ministry is contained to the references to families, parishes, associations and movements. Searching within the SCCs Website we found a lot of material:

Family: 42 results found.

Marriage: 20 results found.

The free online Ebook on "SCCs in Eastern Africa" has these references:

Family: 779 results found.

Marriage: 478 results found.

Here in Eastern Africa we realized the danger of just affirming current Catholic Church teaching and pastoral practice as in "how can the church help folks to live according to our truth." We tried to respond to Pope Francis' call to be "be bold and creative" in finding new pastoral solutions ("think outside the box").

First to the key Preliminary Question: "Does the description of the various familial situations in the *Relatio Synodi* correspond to what exists in the church and society today [such as in Africa]? We said "An overall yes." Then we named the "missing aspects" from our African experience and perspective]¹¹¹

envisioned it to be in 1965: a body that would provide "for a continuance after the [Second Vatican] Council of the great abundance of benefits that ... result of our close collaboration with the bishops."

NCR Website, retrieved on 30 December, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/news/people/editorial-person-year-2014>

¹¹¹ These "missing aspects" and the following answers to the questions were collated from the following sources:

- Meeting of St. Joachim SCC, Kangemi, Nairobi, Kenya, 1 February, 2015.
- SCCs Class on "SCCs Promote Family and Marriage Ministry in Africa Today," 5 February, 2015 and on "SCCs Involvement in the 2015 Kenya Lenten Campaign on the theme *Build Our Family and Nation with Dignity*," 19 February, 2015 at Tangaza University College, Nairobi, Kenya.
- Meeting of St. Kizito SCC, Waruku, Nairobi, Kenya, 8 February, 2015.

- The questions have a Western tone or viewpoint and sometimes lack a Global South perspective.
- Children are seen as the objects and receivers of pastoral and missionary care. Children can also be the subjects of promoting family relationships and family life, active participants in church life (for example, the liturgy) and agents of evangelization.
- Add “Traditionally Married” to Numbers 41-43.
- Specifically mention the challenge of HIV/AIDS in relation to family and marriage.
- Specifically mention the challenge of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).
- Specifically mention the challenge of child-headed households.
- Specifically mention the influence of witchcraft and superstition in African culture.
- The trend towards euthanasia is an alarming aspect in the intergenerational conflict.
- Specifically emphasize the importance of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in promoting family and marriage ministry in the world today. One example is *Bible* reading, reflection and study in SCCs.
- Specifically emphasize the importance of the Pontifical Mission Childhood (PMC) in Catholic family life.
- More on traditional family and community values.
- More on “Rites of Passage” especially the communal spirit.
- More on good and responsible parenting.
- Contextualize the hopes of the document more.

Pope Francis' prayer intention for evangelization in February, 2015 was: “That married people who are separated may find welcome and support in the Christian community.” What are

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- Meeting of the Commission for Missions of the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB)’s Annual General Meeting (AGM) at the Watakatifu Wote (All Saints) Pastoral Centre, Ngong Diocese, Kenya, 13 February, 2015.
 - Meeting of the Kenya Diocesan Family Life Coordinators at St. Joseph Conference Center, Karen, Nairobi, Kenya, 25 February, 2015.
 - Formation Meeting on “Better Pastoral Care of Marriages” of the St. John Paul II Evangelizing Teams in Nairobi, Kenya on 15 March, 2015.
 - Meeting of five people to collate the recommendations from the Formation Meeting in Nairobi, Kenya on 17 March, 2015.
 - Meeting of Representatives of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) and Justice and Peace Commission with Mrs. Theresa Abuya to answer some of the questions, Nairobi, Kenya on 18 March, 2015.
 - Answers of Kenyan Dioceses to the questions.
 - Meeting of eight member team to consolidate the responses to the "Lineamenta" for the October, 2015 Synod of Bishops at the JJ McCarthy Centre, Nairobi, 7-8 April, 2015.

our SCCs doing to reach out to these people? Answers posted on the SCCs Facebook Page are found in Chapter 9.

Week Three (“Family and Social Morality”) of the Booklet of the *2015 Kenya Lenten Campaign* presented this question: “What can we do as family or Small Christian Community to promote Christian values in our families?”

In Eastern Africa SCC members focused on Questions 28-39, but we revised them in the Eastern African context. First, we identified 11 marriage situations/categories that need pastoral care ranging from engaged couples to divorced and remarried couples. To make it more real we tried to put people in Kenya that we know in each situation/category.

Then we rewrote and answers some of the questions as follows:

1. How do SCC members guide and accompany engaged couples (in the middle of courtship)?¹¹² Based on the section “Guiding Engaged Couples in Their Preparation for Marriage” (Nos. 39 - 40) that states: “The synod recognized the steps taken in recent years to facilitate an effective preparation of young people for marriage, stressing, however, a need for a greater commitment of the entire Christian community in not only the preparation but also the initial years of family life.” In Eastern Africa SCCs are an important part of the “entire Christian community.”
2. How do SCC members guide and accompany married couples with children who are not married in the Catholic Church?¹¹³ Based on the section “Pastoral Care of Couples Civilly Married, [Traditionally Married] or Living Together¹¹⁴ in Their Preparation for Marriage” (Nos. 41-43) that states: “The Synod discussed diverse situations resulting from a multiplicity of cultural and economic factors, practices

¹¹² Swahili: *Ni kwa namna gani wanajumuiya wanashauriana na kuaambatana na wanaochumbiana?*

¹¹³ Swahili: *Ni kwa namna gani wanajumuiya wanashauriana na kuambatana na wanandoa na watoto wao ambao hawajaoana rasmi katika Kanisa Katoliki?”*

¹¹⁴ This describes cohabitation or the “come we stay” phenomenon in Eastern Africa. There are many Swahili translations, but young people themselves like *kusukuma maisha* (a temporary, “for the time being” arrangement) and *mke wa deni* (a private, almost hidden, transitory arrangement without the dowry being paid). Another popular slang expression is “UN” referring to a young man in a Nairobi slum taking in a poor, vulnerable young woman into his flat. He provides her with the necessities of life in exchange for sexual favors. Compare with a hookup culture in the USA: a culture that accepts and encourages casual sexual encounters, including one-night stands and other related activity, which focus on physical pleasure without necessarily including emotional bonding or long-term commitment. It is generally associated with Western late adolescent behavior and, in particular, American college culture.

grounded in tradition, and the difficulty of young people to make lifetime commitments.”

3. How do SCC members accompany married couples in their first five years of marriage?¹¹⁵ Based on “Accompanying Married Couples in the Initial Years of Marriage” (No. 40).

In our SCCs Course at Tangaza University College on Thursday, 5 February, 2015 we discussed two important topics. How SCCs can supply the extra formation needed for longer and deeper marriage preparation? How SCCs can provide pastoral care for Catholic couples who are separated, divorced and happily remarried “outside” the church?

In answering these questions an on-going challenge is to track creatively the social, economic, political, cultural and religious changes in Africa today.¹¹⁶

- According to the *Urban Dictionary Mpango Wa Kando* (Swahili for “a sideway or outside plan or program” refers to a side relationship or concurrent partnership) or a “jumpoff” is a casual sexual partner or girlfriend, a woman of dubious sexual practices, a mistress, an extramarital partner or a person that is usually only being used for sex while the man is married or in a serious relationship. This is increasing for men as polygamy is decreasing. Even wealthy married women in cities in Africa have these side relationships.
- Young engaged couples are spending so much time on planning the social sides of their marriages (funding raising gatherings, the wedding reception, related parties, etc.) that they give too little time to the religious side and to the specific marriage preparations.

The Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) answered the 46 questions in a 37-page document sent to the Vatican on 15 April, 2015. SCCs are mentioned 23 times. Highlights include:

- Specifically emphasize the importance of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in promoting family and marriage ministry in the world today. One example is *Bible* reading, reflection and study in SCCs.
- The elderly and the ill can be taken care of by their Small Christian Communities.
- Formation of Small Christian Communities to support and strengthen families of believers and those faithful to the bond of marriage

¹¹⁵ Swahili: *Ni kwa namna gani wanajumuiya wanaambatana na wanandoa katika ile miaka yao mitano ya kwanza?*

¹¹⁶ Based on various research and conversations with people such as with Kenyan lay women Mary Getui who teaches courses on Marriage and Sexuality at CUEA and Tangaza.

- Agents of evangelization such as Small Christian Community animators are urgently needed.
- Often the Local Church of Kenya forms supportive groups to cater for the people's special needs, for example, in the Small Christian Communities.
- In Kenya the Catholic Church have 45,000 Small Christian Communities (SCCs). A SCC is a communion of families in the neighborhood. Many are lectionary-based faith sharing groups. On weekly basis these SCCs members read the Gospel of the following Sunday and connect Jesus' teaching to their everyday life.
- The SCCs are domestic churches and through them the Christians and their families are strengthened to be courageous and faithful.
- *Hodi Hodi* (Swahili for "door to door") visitations through Small Christian Communities is a way of empowering families so that they are also evangelizers to each other.
- The Church's pastoral activity towards families, especially those which are wounded and fragile, includes accepting them, journeying with them and visiting them through the SCCs.
- Tangaza University College, a constitutive college of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), in Nairobi has two courses for future priests and other pastoral workers in which married people teach about the family, family values and marriage. The two courses are "Family Ministry" and "Small Christian Communities as a New Model of Church in Africa Today."
- SCCs are starting a Ministry of Pastoral Accompaniment of newly married couples.
- In Kenya we have *wahudumu wa dini* (lay ministries of religious education, family life catechesis and marriage counseling) in SCCs and other apostolic groups.
- There is urgent need to form support groups especially through the networks of family associations, SCCs and other groups.
- Where SCCs are a pastoral priority they offer support to parents in raising their children.
- Allow children to interact and witness to each other in the SCCs and in *Bible Studies* program.
- Both parents (husband and wife) should participate in a SCC together. This models family participation for the children.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB), "Results of the Consultation in Kenya on the 46 Questions in the *Lineamenta* on *The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World*, Nairobi: Unpublished Report, 2015. See Jim McDermott, "Kenya and the

On 8 May, 2015 the National Family Life Program of the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) General Secretariat published a 46-page booklet: *Relatio Synodi 2015 – Pastoral Guidelines for a Process of Discussion and Action*. The Online Version is *Family and Marriage in Kenya Today: Pastoral Guidelines for a Process of Discussion and Action*, <http://www.kccb.or.ke/home/news-2/pastoral-guidelines-for-a-process-of-discussion-in-action>

The “Preface” by Kenyan Bishop Salesius Mugambi, the Chairman of the National Family Life Program, states:

We invite you to participate in a very important “discernment process” in identifying the challenges and finding the pastoral solutions to family and marriage in Kenya today...Most recently the Kenyan Bishops sent to Rome on 15 April, 2015 a 37-page document called “Results of the Consultation in Kenya on the 46 Questions in the *Lineamenta on The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World*. The opening words state: “The Local Church in Kenya, and in particular the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB), is happy to share its pastoral experiences of family and marriage in Kenya with the Catholic Church worldwide”... Due to the positive response to our answers from Kenya, we decided to edit this document and print it in [this] user-friendly booklet form. We hope that you will pray over these answers, reflect on them and discuss them in various meetings coordinated by our Family Life Offices, in small groups involved in family and marriage ministry and in 45,000 SCCs in Kenya. Pope Francis urges us to find concrete, practical, pastoral solutions for our local African reality. As part of our ongoing pastoral process, the Family Life National Office will collate your comments, reflections and pastoral solutions and give them to the Kenyan delegates before they go to Rome in October, 2015.¹¹⁸

The booklet includes a very useful Appendix of “Acronyms and Meanings” of ecclesiastical words.

Copies were distributed throughout Kenya for prayer, discussion, reflection and eventual implementation on the local level.

10. Small Christian Communities in the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the 2015 Synod of Bishops

Survey for the Synod on the Family,” *America Magazine Website*, retrieved on 18 April. 2015, <http://www.americamagazine.org/content/dispatches/kenya-and-survey-synod-family>

¹¹⁸ Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) General Secretariat, *Relatio Synodi 2015 – Pastoral Guidelines for a Process of Discussion and Action*. Nairobi: Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2015, pp. 3-4.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* was published on 1 July, 2015 and will serve as the “Working Document” for the October, 2015 meeting. Plans are underway to update the working method of the synod for the October meeting. Pope Francis, like Pope Benedict XVI before him, has tried to make the synod less a gathering of bishops reading speeches and more a forum for discussing, questioning, studying and praying about the church's response to various pastoral problems.

11. Case Study of an Eastern African SCC

A Case Study of how an African SCC is involved in family ministry and the family apostolate is St. Kizito SCC that is described in many places in this Ebook. One weekly gathering reflected on “Family and Faith,” the theme of Week Two in the 2014 Kenyan Lenten Campaign booklet *How Can We Be One?...for the Sanctification and Salvation of All People*. The meeting took place at the Maryknoll Society House near Waruku in St. Austin’s Parish in Nairobi, Kenya on 9 March, 2014. I am an ordinary member of this SCC. To show solidarity with SCCs in other Eastern African countries the table in the middle of the circle of SCC members was covered with an African *chitenge* cloth that had the title “St. Charles Lwanga Catholic Parish, Regiment Church Lusaka, Zambia” with a drawing of St. Charles Lwanga and the names of all the SCCs in the parish. A striking Ethiopian cross was placed on the table. There were 24 participants: 13 women, nine men and two children. All were lay people except four African Franciscan Religious Sisters of the Immaculate Novices and one expatriate missionary priest (myself).

The SCC members used the three steps of the “See,” “Judge” and “Act” method/ process for the Second Sunday of Lent, 16 March, 2014 as follows:

1. Analyze and discuss the drawing (cartoon) on page 16-17.
2. Read the story in Step One (“See”): “Mr. and Mrs. Kivu and Their Two Children” on page 18-19.
3. Read the Situational Analysis in Step Two (“Judge”) on pages 19-22.
4. Read the Gospel (*Matthew* 17:1-9) and the scripture commentary.
5. Answer question 3 in Step Three (“Act”): “Amidst the challenges facing the family, how is your Small Christian Community helping its members to cope with these challenges?”¹¹⁹

A section from the booklet on the importance of African family values was highlighted:

¹¹⁹ Kenyan lay woman Lucy Nderitu reflected on this question in her St. Matthias Mulumba SCC of Don Bosco Parish, Makuyu, Nairobi Archdiocese on 1 March, 2014. In commenting on how Pope Francis wants to examine the pastoral challenges experienced by family at the October, 2014 Synod, she emphasized that the laws touching on family and marriage passed in the Kenyan Parliament do not take into account African values and Christian values. We have to challenge the wrong application of these laws that may harm our families. We have to train our children in the right direction because they will have the families of the future.

Marriage and family life are important to each and all of us. We all come from families. We all have a mother, father, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, nephews, and nieces. Everyone desires a good, warm and loving family where people care for one another. If we don't have these relatives, we feel deprived. A warm and loving family is God's plan for each of us. From the very beginning, when God created our first parents, Adam and Eve, God had a plan for marriage and family life.¹²⁰

In connecting the theme of family to the Gospel of the Transfiguration, one member said that God has a plan for all humanity, for Jesus as Savior and Redeemer, and for all our African families. Suggestions for action included:

- The family is the first school. As a “communion of families” our St. Kizito SCC is a school too that has a mission to educate.
- Remove the backbiting,¹²¹ jealousy and critical feelings among SCC members and their families.
- Prayer is very practical. We should pray more for our family problems and our family needs.
- As part of our Lenten action, visit the *Amani na Wema* ("Peace and Goodness") Children's Home (AIDS orphans) located in the geographical area of St. Kizito SCC in St. Austin's Parish.

In St Kizito SCC a Kenyan married laywoman, Jackline Oduor, is responsible for marriage ministry and a Kenyan married layman, is the assistant. Unfortunately they have not received special training for their leadership roles. Helping young people in the small community to sacramentalize their marriages (regularize/have marriages blessed in church) is relatively easy. The two main challenges are advising on mixed marriages (such as a Catholic and a Protestant, a Catholic and a Muslim) and counseling couples with marital problems.

Two SCC members, Paul Mboya and Elizabeth Alouch, exchanged their marriage vows at St. Austin's Parish on Saturday, 14 June, 2014. Their invitation card has this powerful prayer:

¹²⁰ Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, *How Can We Be One?* p. 20.

¹²¹ Some years ago SCC members in Tanzania composed an “African Way of the Cross Following Our Local African Situation Especially the Sufferings, Crosses, and Problems of Our Everyday Life.” Women especially, based on their life experiences, composed the 13th Station: "Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross." Theme: “Backbiting, Calumny, Contempt, False Rumors, Gossip, and Insults.” This is described in the story “Living an African Way of the Cross” in Joseph Healey, *What Language Does God Speak: African Stories about Christmas and Easter*, Nairobi: St. Paul Publications Africa, 1989, pp. 65-69, Healey and Sybertz, *Towards An African Narrative Theology*, pp. 243-246 and in “African Lenten and Easter Stories” on the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved 18 August 2014, <http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-by-season/12-easter-stories/53-african-way-of-the-cross-following-our-local-african-situation-especially-the-sufferings-crosses-and-problems-of-our-everyday-life.html>

“May the love we share today mean more tomorrow. May it give dreams and wishes to pursue. So dear Lord, from this day lock our hearts together and keep the key for life.”

Two SCC members, Tobias and Winfred, catered the enjoyable reception in the parish hall afterwards. There was plenty of good food and lively singing and dancing. The next day, Sunday, 15 June, the weekly *Bible* Service of the small community based on the Gospel of the following Sunday took place in the newly wed couple’s home in Waruku. There was a special blessing of the couple, their home and all the SCC members.

St. Kizito SCC helped one of its faithful members, Kimori Conard, to prepare for his marriage with Jackline Kwamboka in Nairobi on 6 December, 2014. It was a long collaborative process. Conard’s SCC in his original home parish in Kisii Diocese was also involved. Kwamboka’s SCC in her original home parish in Kisii Diocese and her St. Elizabeth SCC in St. Francis of Assisi Gatina Outstation in Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in Nairobi were also involved. In addition to St. Kizito SCC itself helping in the marriage preparations and making a financial contribution, some SCC members were part of a group called “Friends of Conrad Kimori.” They met weekly to raise funds for the wedding. Then many SCCs members actively participated in the wedding at St. Francis of Assisi Gatina Church and celebrated together at the reception.

As a happily married couple Kimori and Jackline now live in Waruku and are very involved in their SCC. They are very active in encouraging other young people to get married in the Catholic Church. They each gave a Marriage Testimony during the Formation Meeting of the St. John Paul II Evangelizing Teams in Nairobi, Kenya on 15 March, 2015. They described the steps in their marriage preparation and their present married life together. Jackline said, “we ask experienced marriage couples to journey with us”¹²² -- in the spirit of accompaniment. In a later conversation on the many problems connected with the dowry in Kenyan society, Jackline said “my parents were not after the dowry; they wanted to help my growing faith.”¹²³

Now the SCC members are helping Agnes Alitsi and Ben Wanjala to finish the steps of their marriage preparation. Some of the SCC members serve in the new Ministry of Marriage Accompaniment. Some married couples are Marriage Pastoral Accompaniers before and after the church marriage.

The active involvement of men is a big factor in St. Kizito SCC. On Sunday, 17 August, 2014 SCC members met for the first time in the new House of Charity Children Home. 33 participated (13 laymen, 12 laywomen, four religious sisters, two children, one priest and one seminarian). SCC members visited and prayed for the 17 abandoned babies (all under three years old) in the home. Helping abandoned babies is one of the challenges in responding to the harsh reality of family life and marriage in Kenya today. SCC members reflected on the Gospel of the

¹²² Jackline Kwamboka, Formation Meeting of the St. John Paul II Evangelizing Teams. Nairobi, Kenya, 15 March, 2015.

¹²³ Jackline Kwamboka in a conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya on 17 March, 2015.

following Sunday (21st Sunday in Ordinary Time). A number of men gave reflections on the themes of faith, inculturation and authority and offered some Prayers of the Faithful.

There are many men in St. Kizito SCC. Some are leaders who are active in promoting family and marriage values. Why the difference from other SCCs in Nairobi that have very few male members?¹²⁴ Three reasons stand out. First, men from lower income families seem to participate more in SCCs than men from wealthy families. Most SCC *Bible* Services take place on Sunday afternoons. The more wealthy men are out spending money. The poorer men in the informal settlements are at home with their children and free to participate in their SCCs. Second, St. Kizito has a healthy mix of many different Kenyan ethnic groups and originally from all over Kenya. There is no dominant ethnic group that is common in other parts of Kenya. All ethnic groups are welcome and participate. Third, husbands have moved to Nairobi for work and live with some of their older children who are in school while their wives remain back in the villages with some of the younger children. For example, the chairperson (“minister of the ministers” or “servant of the servants”) is a Luyia who lives in Waruku while his wife lives in Kakamega in Western Kenya. The secretary is a Kamba who lives in Waruku while his wife lives in Kitui in Eastern Kenya.

On Sunday, 7 September, 2014 members of St. Kizito SCC and St. Peter Mwamba SCC had a joint Recollection Day. There was a total of 51 participants. – 46 adults and five children. The overall theme was “The Importance of the Family and Marriage in Kenya Today.” The first session was on “Forgiveness and the Family Tree” and the second session was on “Our Experience of Family and Marriage Ministry in Kenya Today.” One learning was that the lay ministers of children, youth and marriage in our SCCs need special training.

After the publication of the English text of the "Final Report of the Third Extraordinary Synod" (18 October, 2014), members of St. Kizito SCC are implementing two recommendations of how SCCs can be involved in the pastoral care of married couples:

No. 39 on "Guiding Engaged Couples in Their Preparation for Marriage:"
Experienced SCC couples should pastorally accompany and guide engaged couples.

No. 40 on "Accompanying the Married Couples in Their Initial Years of Marriage:"
Experienced SCC couples should pastorally accompany young married couples.

First, experienced couples in St. Kizito SCC should be chosen for the ministry of accompaniers and guiders. Then they should be trained in their specific ministries. There should be training programs for married couple accompaniers (mentor couples) and other facilitators/formators/presenters/trainers. Emphasize Train the Trainers (TOT) Workshops for parishes, schools and marriage programs. All this should be in the context of lengthening and deepening the pre-marital catechesis and the post-marital catechesis.

¹²⁴ Compare with St. Catherine of Siena SCC in Queen of Heaven Parish in Karen, Nairobi. At the weekly SCC *Bible* Sharing/*Bible* Reflection on Monday, 28 July, 2014 there were one man and 16 women. The reasons given: some of the SCC members are widows, their husband are not Catholics; their husbands are working; and their husbands are just not interested.

Two ongoing challenges are:

- How SCC members should accompany families and couples who are wounded and on the periphery.
- How in parishes together with various lay movements SCC members should be united to families and to work with them to promote the living of the “Gospel of the family” in homes.

12. 2014-2015 as the “Years of the Family and Marriage”

The closing of the 2012-2013 Year of Faith at the end of November, 2013 opened the door to a new theme for SCCs in Eastern Africa: 2014-2015 as the “Years of the Family and Marriage.” This is part of SCCs’ active participation in preparing for the two World Synod of Bishops Meetings in Rome. Many dioceses have officially declared 2014 as the “Year of the Family” such as: Dar es Salaam Archdiocese, Tanzania; Johannesburg Archdiocese, South Africa; Machakos Diocese, Kenya; Moshi Diocese, Tanzania; Mwanza Archdiocese, Tanzania; Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya; Ngong Diocese, Kenya (the motto on banners is *The family that prays together stays together*); and Shinyanga Diocese, Tanzania. Various Catholic institutions have declared 2014 as the “Year of the Family.” In its information posters the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) in Nairobi includes the saying *A family that prays together stays together*.

Machakos Diocese in Kenya has over 5,000 SCCs. The theme of its 2014 Diocesan Calendar is: “Called to Emulate the Holy Family.” This helps to remind us that the first SCC is the Holy Family.¹²⁵ The diocese’s 10-year report has a section on “The Year of the Family.” First in reviewing the 2012-2013 “The Year of Faith” it states: “Much was accomplished from the Small Christian Communities’ level to the diocesan level.”¹²⁶ Then SCCs are seen in the context of the family that is the smallest unit of our society.

Mwanza Archdiocese in Tanzania also has an excellent 2014 Archdiocesan Calendar on “The Year of the Family.” Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Ruwa’ichi’s emphasis on family values can be found in Chapter 10.

The theme of the Paulines Publications Africa 2014 Calendar is “Family Calendar with Pope Francis.” The Paulines have a wide range of pamphlets, booklets and books on family life including the “Family Today Series” and the “Joy of Living Series.” These are

¹²⁵ Cardinal Berhaneyesus Souraphiel writes: “Family is facing so many challenges nowadays! May the Holy Family, Jesus - Mary - and Joseph, pray for Christian Families all over the world.” Email message to the author, 12 June, 2014.

¹²⁶ *Journey of 10 Years Achievements. Catholic Diocese of Machakos. Bishop Martin Kivuva, Machakos: Privately Printed, 2014, p. 19.*

easily affordable and can be a regular part of SCC meetings and individual family meetings and discussions.

The theme of New People Media Center *Mission Calendar 2015* is "Family and Evangelization" with quotations on the family and mission for each month taken from synod documents, Pope Francis, Vatican II and other sources.

In 2014 the monthly "*Mwaki*" (Gikuyu for "SCC") Radio Program on CORO FM in Nairobi focused on "SCCs Promote the Pastoral Care of Family and Marriage."¹²⁷ This theme was also used in a Swahili program (called *Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo, Oyee!*) and an English program on Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC).

"Family Catechism" and "Family Catechesis" were two themes in Week Two on "Family and Faith" in the Kenyan Lenten Campaign 2014 booklet.¹²⁸ Family is vital in passing on a living faith on to the next generation. In **bold** print the booklet states: "**Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore, must be recognized as the primary and principal educators.**"¹²⁹

One is reminded that 35 years ago in October, 1980 over 200 bishops from some 90 countries met in Rome for the first World Synod of the Bishops on the Family. The full title was: "On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World." It was the first synod of the papacy of St. John Paul II and ultimately resulted in his 1981 apostolic exhortation on the family called *The Family in the Modern World (Familiaris Consortio)*. It emphasized the family as the "domestic church," the place where Christian religion is learned, experienced, lived.

¹²⁷ The monthly themes were as follows:

MARCH - helping young couples to solemnize their marriage in the church
 APRIL - helping marriages with problems
 MAY - issue of divorce
 JUNE - religious education for your children
 JULY - tackling various addictions
 AUGUST - single motherhood
 SEPTEMBER - building the family culture
 OCTOBER - celebrating marriages in church
 NOVEMBER - stock taking of what we have done since March

¹²⁸ Nairobi Archdiocese has conducted "Training of Trainers" (TOTs) Workshops to train people from every deanery (both clergy and lay) on the theme and weekly topics in the booklet. In this way both the process and content get down to the SCC members on the local level. Research over many years clearly shows that SCC leaders and animators need regular training in the use and application of the booklets especially the process/methodology of starting from life experience (a story in Step One -- "See").

¹²⁹ Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, *How Can We Be One?* p. 21.

Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa are helping its members in this family catechesis. Education of children starts in the family, in the home. A SCC is a communion of families. The SCC is an important support group for families – for the parents and the children alike. The SCC is also a place for religious education, pastoral care and evangelization. SCCs can promote a family culture. One specific challenge is the education of children in irregular marriages.

An interesting Case Study is the St. Andrew Kaggwa Catechetical Training Center in Mumias (also called the Mumias CTC) in Kakamega Diocese, Kenya. During the two year residence course the 15 couples (the catechist and spouse) form a SCC. Each couple has a specific ministry in the SCC, for example, Marriage Counselor. This couple counsels the other couples if problems arise in their marriages. If there is tension between couples themselves the chairperson (another catechist) tries to bring about a reconciliation. During the course talks are given on SCCs and family catechesis. Two of the books required for the catechists' training are *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment and Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*.¹³⁰

St. Matia Mulumba Catechetical Training Center in Mityana, Uganda has a similar SCC plan. The 60 catechists (presently 45 men and 15 women) form five SCCs each with a priest chaplain. Many liturgical and pastoral activities pass through the SCCs. On Wednesdays the five SCCs read and reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday.¹³¹

"The Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization," was the theme of the Formation Meetings of the St. John Paul II Parish Evangelizing Teams in Nairobi, Kenya in 2014. The theme on Sunday, 16 February, 2014 was: "Using the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Method of "See," "Judge" and "Act" to Reflect on Key Pastoral Problems Related to Family and Marriage in Kenya Today." After wide consultation on the real issues in family and marriage in Kenya today (*hali halisi* in Swahili), the participants divided into SCCs to reflect on some of the following topics:

- *Helping young couples/couples with children to get married in a Catholic Church.*
- *Counseling couples with marriage problems.*
- *Divorce caused by financial pressures.*
- *Advising single mothers on raising their children.*
- *Increasing number of abortions.*

¹³⁰ Based on the author's conversation with Kenyan diocesan priest Father Vincent Lumumba in Nairobi, Kenya, 18 June 2014.

¹³¹ Based on the author's conversation with Ugandan diocesan priest Father Emmanuel Katongole in Nairobi, Kenya, 27 June 2014.

- *Helping children and young people who have addictions including alcoholism, drugs, excessive attachment to electronic devices/gadgets (computer games, internet surfing, online music, social media), gambling and pornography.*
- *Religious education for your children.*
- *Jobs for Youth/Problem of Youth Unemployment*¹³²

After discussing the meaning of the topic, SCC members looked up *Bible* passages on the topic and then discussed the practical solutions and actions to be taken. Some of the influences and factors involved in these problems and challenges included (alphabetically):

- bad local environment
- careless use of money
- curiosity
- effects of poverty
- financial pressures
- generational gap
- lack of communications
- lack of honesty and trust
- losing job
- no children
- no prayer life in the family
- parental neglect
- partner has other relationships
- selfishness
- stress

Under solutions it was recommended that the SCC can be a support system and “home” for its members especially in African cities. Regular prayer in the SCCs is very important including teaching the children how to pray. SCC members can work with professional counselors and groups such as Couples for Christ, Family Life Ministries, Marriage Encounter, Pre-Cana, Retrouvaille and 12 Step Groups (Al-Anon, Alcoholics Anonymous, etc.), etc.

One of the best ways of celebrating the “2014-2015 Year of the Family and Marriage” is to emphasize these priorities in the annual “Days” and “Events” of the SCCs, apostolic groups and parishes. The Catholic Men Association celebrated a National Night Vigil of Prayers with the motto *Good Family, Good Church* on 23 May, 2014 at Karen, Nairobi. Mwalimu Simon Rurinja, a member of our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team, spoke on “Why Divorce is More Rampant in Christian Marriage than in Traditional Marriage.”

¹³² This is a problem that affects the social, economic and pastoral life of families throughout Africa. High unemployment of youth affects the stability of families and marriages.

Queen of Apostles Parish in Nairobi, Kenya had an interesting family plan in 2014. Annually all the SCCs in the parish have a lively choir competition when each small community performs the same new religious song in Swahili composed by a Kenyan priest. It is a special teaching moment. The message of the song that emphasizes African Christian values is as important as the skill of the singers. The competition builds up teamwork and collaboration in the practice sessions of the individual SCCs and a sense of solidarity throughout the whole parish. In 2014 the themes of love, joy and sharing appeared in the Swahili song *Familia ya Kikristu* ("The Family of Christ"). Various family values were highlighted. The preliminary completion started at the outstation level and moved towards choosing the SCC parish winner in a festive grand finale.¹³³

Various workshops and seminars are being conducted on the overall theme "Year of the Family and Marriage." Leaders of 12 SCCs in Imara Seko Outstation in Mwanhuzi Parish, Shinyanga Diocese, Tanzania participated in a two day workshop on 27-28 June, 2014. Every SCC member is a missionary by virtue of his or her Baptism. Members should proclaim the Good News of Salvation and be active evangelizers. The church is not a building, but a community of believers. We should focus on our heavenly home, rather than earthly values and priorities. Young people should be encouraged to get married in the Catholic Church so they can receive communion.¹³⁴

Another example is St. Jude Catholic Church, Doonholm, Nairobi, Kenya. Its Family Day is celebrated every year on 28 October, the Feast Day of St. Jude Thaddeus. SCCs participate in the liturgy such as bringing up the Offertory Gifts. After the homily marriages are solemnized in the context of f

Another opportunity is Good Shepherd Sunday also called World Vocations Sunday that is celebrated on the Fourth Sunday after Easter with the Gospel story of Jesus as the Good Shepherd from St. *John*. Traditionally this day focused specifically on vocations to the priesthood and religious life. But now guidelines from the Vatican encourage prayers for vocations to all walks of life including married people and families. The 11 May, 2014 Vocations Sunday Poster of the Kenya Pontifical Missionary Societies (PMS) has the theme: "Witness to the Truth." It has photos of an African bishop ordaining a priest, African religious sisters praying together and a groom at a marriage ceremony putting the ring on his bride's finger. By extension we can pray for the vocation to be SCC members and members of apostolic groups.

The Synod of Bishops XIV Ordinary General Assembly will take place in Rome in October, 2015 and will "seek working guidelines in the pastoral care of the person and the family." *New People Magazine* will introduce a new section in 2015 called "Family on Mission." Married couples will be invited to write articles on the following suggested themes:

¹³³ Based on a conversation with Kenyan layman Steve Mwangi, a member of St. Peter SCC in Thome 1 Estate, St. Gabriel Outstation, Queen of Apostles Parish, Ruaraka in Nairobi on 13 June, 2014.

¹³⁴ Information supplied by Simon Rurinjah.

- “Marriage as a Vocation:” January-February, 2015
- “Praying within the Family:” March-April, 2015
- “Education of the Children:” May-June, 2015
- “Family: The Domestic Church:” June-July, 2015
- “Evangelizing as a Family:” September-October, 2015.
- “Responsible Parenthood:” November-December, 2015

Married couples in SCCs are challenged to volunteer to write some of these articles. The theme of the “Mission Calendar 2015” of the New People Media Center is “Family and Evangelization.”

Many catechetical and liturgical materials are being produced that can be used in SCCs like *Together as One: Catechetical Sessions for Married Couples* (Arua Diocese, Uganda Publications). This is an 84-page booklet with 13 catechetical sessions for married couples and designed to be led by a married couple (or by a married man and a married woman).

In summary: During this “2014-2015 Years of the Family and Marriage” SCC members in Eastern Africa are helping young people to have a sacramental marriage in church and helping to reconcile couples who are having difficulties in their marriages. Parish-based SCCs¹³⁵ have many opportunities to promote family ministry, family life apostolate, family evangelization, family catechesis, family values and marriage catechesis in their parishes and other places in

¹³⁵ Marriage experts and marriage advocates from all over the world signed an open letter in June, 2014 addressed to Pope Francis and the members of the 2014 Synod on the Family that stated:

Perhaps the boldest new way we can evangelize married couples (and by extension their children’s future marriages) is to build small communities of married couples who support each other unconditionally in their vocations to married life. These communities would provide networks of support grounded in the bonds of faith and family, commitment to lifelong marriage, and responsibility to and for each other.

The letter also recommended “creating small clusters of married couples at the parish level for mutual support.”

“Marriage Experts Send Open Letter to Pope, Synod Members: Underline Challenges Facing Family, Timeless Truths About Marriage,” *ZENIT: The World Seen From Rome*, 29 September, 2014. Thus small communities of married couples can be an important type of SCC.

Eastern Africa. This contributes to the ongoing development of the identity and pastoral mission of the Church as Family of God in Africa.

13. Toward Bold and Creative Pastoral Solutions in Africa

In No. 33 of *The Joy of the Gospel* Pope Francis says:

Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way.” I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities. A proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory. I encourage everyone to apply the guidelines found in this document generously and courageously, without inhibitions or fear. The important thing is to not walk alone, but to rely on each other as brothers and sisters, and especially under the leadership of the bishops, in a wise and realistic pastoral discernment.¹³⁶

Thus we are challenged to this task of rethinking in a communal search and in wise and realistic pastoral discernment. In various documents and speeches Pope Francis explains this new process. Pope Francis says that he is open to changing Catholic Church regulations (NOT doctrine) for pastoral reasons, that is, finding a “pastoral solution.” He says if there is a consensus of the recommendations of bishops on the local level (for example, a national or regional episcopal conference) on a particular pastoral issue, change is possible in the context of a process of subsidiarity (decentralization) and collegiality.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Magesa insightfully commented:

John Paul II’s papacy and the nearly eight years of his successor Benedict XVI (2005-2013) saw some practical retrenchment from the theological vision of Vatican II, something which, after Benedict’s surprise resignation on 28 February, 2014, Pope Francis his successor, has been trying to undo since his election on 13 March.

Laurenti Magesa, “Endless Quest,” p. 9.

¹³⁷ [In an interview with the author at Georgetown University on 9 October, 2014, Ladislaus Orsy confirmed that](#) “affective collegiality” involves a consultative process by the world bishops while “effective collegiality” is involves a deliberative process (decision-making that includes voting to reach a consensus). Francis wants national bishops’ conferences to be more involved in the collegial process and ideally present a consensus view on a particular pastoral topic from the grassroots level. The Holy Spirit works through the consensus of these local bishops.

More specifically Pope Francis said: “We are on the way towards a deeper matrimonial pastoral care.”¹³⁸ He recommends that we should respond pastorally to the facts on the ground and not try to impose an ideological solution based on some ideal that rarely exists in the real world. Francis seems to favor a more pastoral approach to the equally perplexing questions of “invalid” marriages -- couples who do not get married in church in the first place and couples who remarry outside the church without getting an annulment. Regarding the Eucharist, in No. 47 of *The Joy of the Gospel* he says: “The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.”

A key issue is finding a pastoral solution to the two meanings of the “Eucharistic Famine” (also called the “Eucharistic Hunger”) in Africa today that are described as follows:

- Due to the lack of priests on any given Sunday in Africa most Catholics (on an average 60% but up to up to 80% in some surveys) participate in a “Sunday Service without a Priest” (especially in rural areas) where there is no Holy Communion rather than participate in a regular mass. This is popularly called “the Eucharistic Famine.” In a few of these services communion is distributed by the catechist or by a trained and installed lay leader.

While statistics vary here is a dramatic Case Study from Uganda:

With such a huge area to cover, St. Matia Mulumba Parish in Irundu in Jinja Diocese, Uganda has developed in a typically African way – with a fully involved laity running most of the parish activities. Because of the vastness of the parish and lack of transport, fewer than one per cent of parishioners are able to attend one of the six Sunday Masses; but there are 36 sub-centers where Sunday worship (a “Sunday Service Without a Priest” or “Liturgy of the Word”) is offered without clergy. This is the main Sunday worship for the vast majority. A full-time catechist leads a team of eight part-time paid catechists who lead these liturgies.¹³⁹

A complete analysis of St. Matia Mulumba Parish shows that each of the three priests celebrate two masses in a Sunday Mass Center making up the total of six masses in the parish. 99% of the Catholics participate in the services in the 36 sub-centers that do not have a tabernacle where the Blessed Sacrament reserved. Some, not all catechists, are installed to carry the Eucharist from the main enter to the sub-centers. This happens mainly on Christmas and Easter. So many people go spiritually hungry.

A similar pattern is in Iramba Parish in Musoma Diocese, Tanzania where the author served for five years, most of the time as the lone priest. I celebrated two masses

¹³⁸ Francis, *Vatican Information Service*, 31 July, 2013, p. 20.

¹³⁹ James Cutts, “Across the Continents,” 22 January 2015, *Tablet*, Tablet Website, retrieved on 24 January, 2015, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/parish-practice/6/4469/across-the-continents>

each Sunday, one mass at the Iramba Parish Center and one mass at one of the three subparishes or Sunday Mass centers on a rotation basis. In addition there were nine outstations where the catechist led the “Sunday Service without a Priest” in small chapels that did not have a tabernacle where the Blessed Sacrament was reserved. The catechists did not carry the Eucharist by motorcycle or bicycle from the Parish Center to the outstations. So on a given Sunday the Catholics received communion in only two out of the 13 places of worship. Again many people went spiritually hungry.

In general the AMECEA Bishops do not allow the Eucharist to be reserved in outstation chapels mainly because of security issues and do not allow the catechists to give out communion because of the abuses that have taken place.

- Up to 60% of adult Catholics in Africa have not had their marriages blessed in church (sacramentalized). So one increasingly hears the expression “Eucharistic Famine” referring to the many, many Catholics in Africa who cannot receive communion because they are not officially married in the Catholic Church. A serious, ongoing pastoral challenge for SCCs is to help many of their members to regularize their marriages in a Catholic ceremony so they can receive communion.
- Practical pastoral solutions would help lay people in Africa to receive communion more frequently and thus nourish their all-important eucharistic spirituality (“the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life,” Second Vatican Council, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, No. 10 and *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1324).

With such a wide variety of bishops and their different cultural, theological and pastoral views in the national bishops’ conferences, one might ask: Is a consensus possible right now on a new pastoral solution to a pastoral issue such as the Eucharistic Famine in Africa with its two meanings? Tanzanian Bishop Rensus Nkwande of Bunda Diocese comments that the bishops themselves argue about the best pastoral solutions to this issue so consensus is very hard.¹⁴⁰

First let us look at a new process that is evolving that we might call “open discussion and debate leading to a deeper discernment” under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Many commentators have emphasized the fact that at the Third Extraordinary Synod in October, 2014 the bishops and cardinals publicly disagreed with one another in their attempt to discern what is good for the church. The Catholic Church really has not had this experience since the open debates of the Second Vatican Council.¹⁴¹ The pope himself supported this open discussion and

¹⁴⁰ Rensus Nkwande, conversation with the author, Maryknoll, New York, 14 May, 2015.

¹⁴¹ Historians comment on the great influence and help of Catholic theologians on the bishops and documents of Vatican Two. Today there is a lot of discussion on the uneasy relationship between theologians and bishops, for example, in the USA. John Allen points out that the African theologians, especially the progressive theologians, and the African bishops seem to move on parallel tracks without too much dialogue and communications. Commentators have said that at various synods of bishops without the help of theologians the African bishops’ interventions are less theologically sound or astute.

said in “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Conclusion of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops”:

Personally I would be very worried and saddened if it were not for these temptations and these animated discussions; this movement of the spirits, as St Ignatius called it (*Spiritual Exercises*, 6), if all were in a state of agreement, or silent in a false and quietist peace.... Many commentators, or people who talk, have imagined that they see a disputatious Church where one part is against the other, doubting even the Holy Spirit, the true promoter and guarantor of the unity and harmony of the Church... now we still have one year to mature, with true spiritual discernment, the proposed ideas and to find concrete solutions to so many difficulties and innumerable challenges that families must confront; to give answers to the many discouragements that surround and suffocate families.

Then in the “Homily of Pope Francis” at the “Closing Mass of The Extraordinary Synod on The Family and Beatification of the Servant of God Paul VI”:

In these days, during the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, we have seen how true this is. “Synod” means “journeying together”. And indeed pastors and lay people from every part of the world have come to Rome, bringing the voice of their particular Churches in order to help today’s families walk the path the Gospel with their gaze fixed on Jesus. It has been a great experience in which we have lived *synodality* and *collegiality*, and felt the power of the Holy Spirit who constantly guides and renews the Church.

The goal is deeper pastoral and theological discernment leading to new pastoral solutions. This is an on-going process of listening, discussion,¹⁴² dialogue, debate, discernment and proposed pastoral responses. Open discussion, debate and even disagreement may be new for African bishops, but it can be creative. It is the spirit, process and practice of synodality and collegiality under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Let us review the ongoing discussion and discernment regarding:

- **Pastoral Solution to the First Meaning of the Eucharistic Famine: Ordination of Married Community Elders.**

Providing the Eucharist to all Catholics in Africa is a great need. Malawian theologian Bishop Patrick Kalilombe, MAfr emphasizes that the Eucharist community is the heart of our Christian life. He says that if Christian communities in Africa cannot receive the Eucharist because of the lack of ordained ministers that presently in the Latin Rite are male, celibate priests, then we must rethink our church laws and pastoral practices, for example, ordain mature

¹⁴² See the creativity of St. Paul Inside the Walls in Madison New Jersey, USA’s Young Adult Fireside Chat: Open discussion for young adults that welcomes opposing viewpoints on the great moral issues of our day.

married men of proven leadership skills (*virī probatī* in Latin). Then many more people would be able to receive communion and our SCCs would truly be Eucharistic Communities.

In another part of the Global South Bishop Erwin Krautler, bishop of Xingu (pronounced Shin-goo) Diocese, Brazil has argued that the pastoral situation calls for drastic measures. In April, 2014 he took his case to the Vatican where he met with Pope Francis. Recently, Krautler and Cardinal Claudio Hummes, a friend of Pope Francis, presented the idea of ordaining married community elders to Brazil's National Conference of Bishops that is now in the process of forming a commission to delve deeper into the matter. Krautler said that he counted himself among a group of bishops, mostly in the Global South, who see the ordination of such elders as a potential solution for the countless rural congregations that cannot receive the sacraments, including Holy Communion, marriage and baptism. Krautler said that Pope Francis has encouraged open dialogue on the issue and urged bishops at the national level to come up with "courageous" proposals to address the priest shortage.¹⁴³

An Editorial in *Tablet* points out: "Pope Francis has indicated that he is prepared to lift the obligation of celibacy for candidates for the priesthood in response to a plea from an individual diocesan bishop or from a bishops' conference."¹⁴⁴

The retired German Fidei Donum Bishop Fritz Lobinger of Aliwal Diocese, South Africa has written extensively on topics such as *Teams of Elders: Moving Beyond "Virī Probatī"* (Claretian Publications, 2007) and *Every Community Its Own Ordained Leaders* (Claretian Publications, Philippines, 2008). He puts forward the case for ordaining married men in underserved areas. In commenting on the World Church, and particularly the Global South, Lobinger states: "The priestless communities of the South have already developed a ministry structure of their own. We just have to build on it."¹⁴⁵ "Lay leaders preach, conduct services, conduct funerals, pray for the sick and in some areas they are even authorized to conduct baptisms and marriages. There can be no doubt that they would also be accepted if they were ordained to the ministerial priesthood."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Summary of Benjamin Soloway, "Brazilian Bishop Urges Ordination of Married Community Elders, *Religious News Service*, 24 November, 2014, Reprinted in *Washington Post* http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/religion/brazilian-bishop-urges-ordination-of-married-community-elders-as-priest-shortage-grows/2014/11/24/1e657fb8-7412-11e4-95a8-fe0b46e8751a_story.html and *Huffington Post* http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/25/brazilian-bishop-ordain-married-elders_n_6215286.html

¹⁴⁴ "England Can Break New Ground," *Tablet*, 13 November 2014, retrieved from the Tablet Website, 20 November, 2104, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/editors-desk/1/3879/england-can-break-new-ground>

¹⁴⁵ Fritz Lobinger, letter to the author dated 28 September, 2013.

¹⁴⁶ Fritz Lobinger in Benjamin Soloway, "Brazilian Bishop," p. 1.

A key for Lobinger is that the ordination of elders would work in vibrant, self-reliant Catholic communities in Africa such as the networks of parish-based SCCs. He admits that some priests view a new path to ordination without formal academic training or the celibacy requirement as a threat that could undermine the traditional priesthood. But Lobinger argues that traditionally trained priests would fit into the new system. “The new local leaders (Married Community Elders) become a leadership team and the priests become formators.”¹⁴⁷ He adds:

I hope that some Bishops Conferences will make such proposals [on married priests] during this year. I am strongly in favor of this proposal but I feel we have to go into some detail because we might otherwise make some mistakes and might cause more problems than we solve. You remember that several bishops of Africa were convinced we should ordain the existing catechists. That would have caused problems indeed. The theme needs to be discussed thoroughly.¹⁴⁸

Lobinger comments positively on the SCCs in Eastern Africa: “The Catholic Church in Eastern Africa is firmly on the path of community building, exactly following the path on which the Early Church has put us. You have developed SCCs in your parishes in order to learn more about ways of becoming a community in Christ, as brothers and sisters. What would make my joy even greater would be to see how some of you are developing new materials for further developing this aim of becoming a Community Church. Times are moving on and we have to move on with them.”¹⁴⁹

The retired Bishop Colin Davies of Ngong Diocese, Kenya writes:

I am going to advocate the incorporation of the Byzantine Rite into the Roman Rite which has the option of having married priests. Celibacy, a most treasured gift to the Catholic Church, has now become a block to helping to solve the problem, not only of Eucharistic Hunger but also of the Pastoral (Prophetic) Role of Christ active in the Eucharistic Ministry and in the Priesthood of the Laity. I am hoping it will be recognized and discussed as one of the “Sign of the Times” at the forthcoming Synods of Bishops. I see SCCs as seeds for the growth of Eucharistic Communities with the possibility of mature laymen becoming ordained priests!!!¹⁵⁰

In another article Davies writes about the Eucharistic Hunger in the Catholic Church today and the urgent pastoral need for more priests to celebrate mass. He cites the diocese in Brazil that has 800 eucharistic communities but only 17 active celibate priests. He strongly

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Fritz Lobinger, email message to author dated 31 January, 2015.

¹⁴⁹ Fritz Lobinger, email message to Ephigenia Gachiri, 2013.

¹⁵⁰ Colin Davies, email messages to the author, 21 April, 2014 and 22 April, 2014.

advocates married priests in a section on “Some Considerations on Proposed Neighborhood Eucharistic Communities (NEC):

The Byzantine Rite Model (adapted as necessary) would not prevent the present structures to continue but would allow additional ones. It would not require changes to the call for celibate priests. There would not seem to be any theological difficulties. Each potential NEC would be required to solve its own problems, case by case, regarding choice and acceptance of a married priest and his sustainability. A solution in a particular case should be possible since it has been found in Slovakia and other countries with the Byzantine Rite. Even Pentecostal sects have thrived on their own financial self-support. It would not be the total solution to the problems resulting from lack of vocations in the Catholic Church, but it would make a big difference. It would overcome the present pessimism in many quarters.

We recall that in the parable of the workers in the vineyard Christ proposed the idea of hiring workers in the vineyard, “even” at the eleventh hour (*Matthew* 20:1-16). The priority was the harvest, not financial or other considerations. These “extra workers” did the job, but why had they not been recruited? “Because no one has hired us...”

The NEC model would enable a bishop to provide priests more easily, in progressive stages, but also bring the church nearer to the people involving them fully in the mission of the church at the individual as well as the community level. In present circumstances in the [Catholic] Church in the West, the “signs of the times” point in only one direction, that is, to have to go back to the Gospel vitality such as that of the early church, where the laity, at their level, were made responsible and were fully involved in the mission of the church.¹⁵¹

But many other African bishops differ and want to maintain the present celibate priesthood discipline.

One pastoral solution in Africa is local experimentation within a specific context. An interesting proposal comes from England:

It is estimated that one in 10 priests in diocesan ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales began his priestly vocation in the Church of England. Many of them are married... Pope Francis has indicated that he is prepared to lift the obligation of celibacy for candidates for the priesthood in response to a plea from an individual diocesan bishop or from a bishops’ conference... Because of the successful arrangement regarding married former Anglicans, England is uniquely situated to pilot a modest experiment. It is not hard to imagine a bishop finding himself faced with having to close a parish

¹⁵¹ Colon Davies, “A Call to Action on Eucharistic Hunger – Now! Making the Eucharist Available to all Baptized People as the Bread of Eternal Life,” Manchester, England: Unpublished Paper, 2015.

church despite there being a married deacon in the parish. An application to Rome to ordain that deacon to the priesthood, if he is willing, would be by far the better outcome. Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor indicated recently that there are circumstances where he would do precisely that.¹⁵²

A related pastoral solution to the Eucharistic Famine is twofold:¹⁵³

1. Dramatically increase the number of Eucharistic Ministers – sisters, brothers and especially lay people. More religious sisters and brothers could easily make this part of their pastoral ministry. Catechists receive the Order of Eucharistic Minister at the end of catechist school. But other part-time catechists could be installed as Eucharistic Ministers after specialized training. Other lay people – men and women – such as teachers, professional people, parish, sub-parish and outstation leaders, etc. could be trained and installed as well. They could assist the priests in large parishes on Sundays as well as give out the Eucharist at “Sunday Services with a Priest.” They could bring the Eucharist to sick people in their homes on a regular basis.
2. Build strong, secure churches in the sub-parishes or Mass Centers. Have the Blessed Sacrament reserved in these churches. Then the Eucharist could be given out at all services. Have a designated area of the church, or even a secure side chapel (separate or connected) as an Adoration Chapel. Challenge the local lay leaders that they are responsible for the security and upkeep of “their” church.

- **Pastoral Solution to the Second Meaning of the Eucharistic Famine: African Stages of Marriage.**

One intriguing proposal in Africa for many years is to develop an inculturated Rite for the Catechumenate of Christian Marriage (Marriage Catechumenate) similar to the Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA or the adult catechumenate). This could be two years or more depending on the customs and traditions (cultural dimension) of the local ethnic groups in Africa. It would integrate the basic elements of consent in the traditional African marriage rituals into the Christian sacrament of marriage.

¹⁵² Editorial: Married Priests: “England Can Break New Ground,” *Tablet*, Vol. 268, No. 905 (15 November, 2014), p. 2, retrieved on the Tablet Website on 28 November, 2014, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/editors-desk/1/3879/england-can-break-new-ground>

¹⁵³ This solution was developed during discussions in a SCCs Workshop in Tororo, Uganda in May, 2015. This could solve the problem of some Catholics in distant rural areas in Uganda (and other African countries) only receiving the Eucharist twice a year.

This would follow the stages of marriage¹⁵⁴ in an African context (also called “marriage in stages”) where marriage is a process rather than a single event and marriage is between two families rather than just between two individuals. The Catholic sacramental and spiritual “moments” (not “moment”) would take place during different stages of the marriage process: from the first official meeting and agreement of the two families of the couple to the betrothal (engagement) to the living together to paying of the dowry or bridewealth (that often takes place slowly over many years)¹⁵⁵ to the wife’s pregnancy to the birth of the first child¹⁵⁶ to the civil marriage to the Catholic Marriage Rite (that could be in a Catholic Church or in a SCC) to the wedding celebration.¹⁵⁷

The couple usually live together during most of this process -- what is commonly called premarital cohabitation. During this period, sometimes called the “trial marriage” or “the test of compatibility” period, the couple test their ability to live together and to get along with their in-laws such as the wife getting along with her mother-in-law if it is a patrilineal society. In African ethnic groups it is essential for the couple to have successful genital intercourse and for the wife

¹⁵⁴ In an interview with the author in Washington DC on 9 October, 2014 Orsy mentioned that in the history of the Catholic Church the German tribes had this “gradual” approach to the sacrament of marriage. It was confirmed after the couple lived together successfully for six months.

¹⁵⁵ This important ritual is not well understood by Westerners. In some African ethnic groups the dowry or bridewealth payment lasts a lifetime. The groom is required to pay a major portion of it before being allowed to marry the bride. The balance is paid in portions throughout the couple’s lifetime to ensure that there is a continued relationship between the two families.

¹⁵⁶ Here is an interesting parallel: “New Catholics who enter the church at the Easter Vigil continue to meet with their group of sponsors and teachers for months after their initiation through a process called *mystagogia*. They are reminded that the parish community still supports them and that the Easter Vigil was not a graduation ceremony from a program, but the start of something new. In a recent email, my friend Isaac posed a question: What might a mystagogical approach to marriage prep look like? Could parishes invite mentor couples to check in on newlyweds at the three-month, six-month, one-year mark? Could parishes gather groups of couples for faith sharing, community service activities, and social events, with babysitting provided as necessary? Surely, many parishes are already doing these and other things to support married couples. But it would be so valuable for the synod to encourage church leaders to facilitate opportunities for newly married adults beyond traditional marriage and baptism preparation.” Mike Jordon Laskey, “Three Things I'd Tell the Synod on the Family About Marriage,” National Catholic Reporter Website, retrieved on 16 October, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/young-voices/three-things-id-tell-synod-family-about-marriage>

¹⁵⁷ I asked a devout Catholic married woman in Iramba Parish in Musoma Diocese, Tanzania what was the happiest day of her life. She answered: “Not the day of my marriage or the day of the birth of my first child. It was the day my first born son was circumcised.” For her this symbolized that her son had passed to manhood and the continuance of the family lineage was assured. As a mother she had successfully done her part.

to be fertile. If she is barren (as well as not having children) the marriage can break up. More recently if the wife does not get pregnant the man can also be tested because there are various reasons for male infertility (male's inability to cause pregnancy in a fertile female).

An important dimension is the Ministry of Pastoral Accompaniment that is emphasized in the documents of the two World Synods of Bishops (2014-2015) on “Family and Marriage.” SCC members accompany the engaged couple throughout the stages of marriage. A representative of the Catholic Church such as a priest or catechist is present at the important ceremonies and accompanies the couple in the key moments. For example, in a wedding of a couple of the Sukuma Ethnic Group in Tanzania the most important cultural ceremony is when the father of the groom hands over the dowry/bridewealth of cows to the father of the bride. This is a large, joyous event of the two families and the local community that includes the elders making a careful inspection of the cows themselves and a festive meal with plenty of food and local beer. In Bunda Parish in Bunda Diocese the parish priest participates in this celebration and gives a blessing.¹⁵⁸ Mageša goes even further in suggesting that the cultural ceremony of the cows should be combined/integrated with the Catholic Church marriage ceremony.¹⁵⁹

A number of African bishops have pointed out how hard it is to achieve a consensus on marriage rites given the wide variety of African cultural traditions, customs and rites. In an interview with the author, retired Archbishop Raphael Ndingi Mwana’ a Nzeki of Nairobi, Kenya mentioned that the 1994 First African Synod appointed him to a Commission on Marriage in an African Context. He said that our Catholic marriage laws are based on Western law (for example, German law). The hope was to develop common inculturated guidelines on marriage that could be used throughout Africa. But the commission failed and was disbanded. Ndingi said that he could not even get the bishops in Kenya to agree on a common marriage rite for the whole country. Presently in Kenya there are 26 Catholic Dioceses and 42 to 70 ethnic groups (depending on how you count), each with its African traditional marriage customs and rites.¹⁶⁰

Today in Africa there are many John Paul II and Benedict-appointed bishops with their more orthodox, traditional, cautious style. Now Francis-appointed bishops are emerging who have simpler lifestyles and are closer to the people. An example of this diversity is the Catholic Bishops’ Conference in South Africa. Following the process of subsidiarity (decentralization) and collegiality, a big question is how a consensus on new pastoral solutions can evolve on the local level in Africa on the challenges regarding family and marriage?

¹⁵⁸ Based on several conversations with Bill Vos in 2013 and 2014.

¹⁵⁹ Laurenti Mageša in a conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya on 14 March, 2007.

¹⁶⁰ Raphael Ndingi in a conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya in March, 2007.

14. Conclusion: Where Do We Go From Here?

In summary what is the way forward? Where do we go from here? How is the Catholic Church in Eastern Africa preparing for the October, 2015 XIV Ordinary General Assembly on the "The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World." How can Eastern Africa SCCs participate in these practical, pastoral recommendations of AMECEA:

1. Promote the active ministry of the various Commissions/Committees for Marriage and the Family Life Apostolate including the Family Life Desk on the diocesan and national levels in Eastern Africa.
2. Help those looking forward to having their marriages blessed to come to the parish office with their parents, godparents and the chairpersons of their Small Christian Communities to begin a period of catechesis to prepare them to actively participate in the Catholic Church and understand their faith.
3. Lengthen the pre-marital catechesis. Have it focus not just on the wedding ceremony itself, but on the whole Christian life.
4. Lengthen the post-marital catechesis. Create occasions for those who have wedded during the course of the year to meet for an event and share their experiences.
5. Offer more counselling services that help married couples pull through periods of crisis.
6. Provide priest chaplains in the various Christian Family Movements.
7. Promotion Holy Childhood programs at various levels to bring the family together and to appreciate the role of parents in educating children on prayer and giving witness to their faith.
8. Organize celebrations of special masses for Christian families.
9. Bring the administrative process in nullifying marriages to the local level. The National Episcopal Conferences should come up with Judicial Procedures suitable for the local context and the Local Ordinary (Diocesan Bishop) should create a process so that the Marriage Tribunal study the specific cases and submit them to the National Episcopal Conferences for final judgment.¹⁶¹

Responding to the call of Pope Francis and the recommendations of the 2014 Third Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, we are challenged to continue to explore how SCC members and others can accompany families and couples who are wounded. This is the Ministry of Compassionate Accompaniment. This part of the imperative for all Catholics to go to the margins of society to serve the poor, migrants and those without hope. Pope Francis also emphasizes the importance of welcoming, listening to and accompanying young people today.

After the October, 2015 Synod of Bishops itself there will be an ongoing process involving collegiality and subsidiarity. There will be follow-up meetings and various

¹⁶¹ Based on the recommendations of AMECEA Pastoral Department, *AMECEA Contribution to the III Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization*, Nairobi: Privately Printed, 2014.

commissions related to pastoral solutions to the challenges of family and marriage. Ongoing discussion and decision-making will take place on the local level through national episcopal conferences. Pope Francis is expected to issue a *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation* with an ongoing plan of action that includes concrete pastoral solutions. SCCs help to promote this family and marriage ministry.

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Internet Resources

African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website including the "African Stories Database" and "Facebook Page"

<http://www.afriprov.org>

AMECEA Website (including the *AMECEA Online Newsletter*)

<http://www.amecea.org>

Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (CJPC) Website -- Kenya
<http://www.cjpckkenya.org>

Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website and "Facebook Page"
www.smallchristiancommunities.org

Vatican Website
www.vatican.va

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