

Celebrating 8,162 *Communautés Chrétiennes de Base* (CCBs) in Burkina Faso

During our Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Workshop¹ in Ouagadougou from 6-9 August, 2015 we delegates from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eastern Africa (the AMECEA Region of Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia), and Togo as well as Bolivia/Latin America and Missio/Germany. shared the grassroots pastoral experiences of SCCs/BCCs/CCBs in the Local Church in Burkina Faso. Our host country Burkina Faso has 15 dioceses, 177 parishes with CCBs and a total of 8,162 CCBs (*Communautés Chrétiennes de Base* in French) as described in its presentation *L' Experience des Communautés Chrétiennes de Base (CCB) dans L'Eglise Famille de Dieu au Burkina Faso* (English: *The Experience of Basic Christian Communities (BCCs) in the Church Family of God in Burkina Faso*), Ouagadougou: National Council of the Laity of Burkina Faso, Privately Printed, 2015.

In his “Opening Address” Cardinal Philippe Ouedraogo, the Archbishop of Ouagadougou, emphasized the significance of small Base Christian Communities in Africa in relation to the 2015-2016 worldwide Year of Mercy in the Catholic Church and the continent-wide 2015-2016 African Year of Reconciliation (AYR). He said that African BCCs combine the pastoral experience of the apostolic church in the 1st Century and the values of African culture in the 20th and 21st centuries. BCCs play an important role in the growth of the African Church today and promote the theology and practice of the Church as Family of God. He urged the delegates to find concrete ways that SCCs/BCCs can help family and marriage in Africa, adding that at the Synod of Bishops in Rome in October, 2015 “we African Bishops will have something to say.”

During the workshop we visited St. Lazarus CCB, one of the 32 CCBs in Our Lady of the Apostles Parish. Combining three zones in the parish this BCC has 100 families and 600 members. About 60-70 members participated in the singing, dancing, drumming, speeches, questions and answers and prayers in French and Moore the local language. There was a good mixture of women and men and quite a few young people. There was a lot of lay participation and the explanation of many lay ecclesial ministries. Given that Burkina Faso is 60% Muslim the ministry of Christian-Muslim Dialog is very important. *Matthew* 18:21-35 on the theme of “Forgiveness and Reconciliation” was read and reflected upon. BCC members gave practical examples of the challenges of forgiveness in their families and communities. The Prayer Leader emphasized the greatness of God’s mercy and connected the theme to the 2015-2016 Year of Mercy in the Catholic Church. In a joyful spirit of friendship and sharing we visitors were welcomed with a cold local drink made of millet and sugar and roast meat.

We participated in a Small Christian Communities Mass in the chapel in the Centre Africain de Recherche et de formation en developpement humain integral (CARFDHI). For many delegates it was the first time to experience a genuine SCC Mass. To celebrate the continent-wide 2015-2016 African Year of Reconciliation (AYR) the theme was

¹ See Healey, Joseph, “Planning Workshop in Burkina Faso Emphasizes Networking among Small Christian Communities,” Nairobi: Privately Photocopied, 2015. Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website, retrieved on 16 August, 2015, <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/africa/africa-continent/340-planning-workshop-in-burkina-faso-emphasizes-networking-among-small-christian-communities.html>

“Reconciliation and Peace” using the Eucharistic Prayer of Reconciliation. Participants danced into the church singing *Kweli Kweli ni Baraka Kutoka kwa Mungu* (a Swahili song meaning “Yes Indeed These are Blessings Coming from God”). The Exchange of Peace was at the end of the Penitential Rite to show that “the community of believers was of one mind and heart” (*Acts of the Apostles* 4:32) before listening to the Word of God. The symbol of peace was from Mende Ethnic Group in Sierra Leone and ethnic groups in South Sudan and Sudan: simultaneously putting one’s right hand on the other person's left shoulder and saying “peace.”²

Before the readings the *Bible* was carried into the chapel in a *Bible* Procession with singing and dancing. Rather than the traditional homily there was a Shared Homily in small groups of two each. To show the rich diversity of the Catholic Church the *Our Father* was said in different African mother tongues (heart languages) -- Bemba (Zambia), Ewe (Ghana, Togo, Benin and Niger), Lingala (DRC), Luyia (Kenya), Moore (Burkina Faso) and Swahili (Eastern and Central Africa) -- as well as in English, French, German and Spanish. Then everyone joined hands and prayed a second time in one language, French, to show the unity in the church.

We learned a lot about the Burkina Faso history. Democratic Republic of the Congo Sister José Ngalula, RSA points out:

While celebrating the 75th anniversary of the evangelization of Burkina Faso in 1975, the Christians of this country manifested, through a survey made in 1976, their desire to live together in the church structures as a family; so the bishops opted for BCCs, where this spirit of family can really arise. This became an official pastoral option in 1977: to realize, both in the spirit and in the structures of dioceses, the church as family where the members are bound, active and responsible, meeting regularly to meditate and share the Word of God.³

Burkina Faso Scripture Scholar Father Paul Bere, SJ provides a further cultural context:

If we think of the SCCs as our Christian clan, then we can imagine the SCC as a place where spiritual guidance is received. There Christians learn to

² See 17 examples of specific African cultural symbols of sorrow, repentance, forgiveness, healing, reconciliation and peace in Joseph Healey, Rose Musimba and Febian Pikiti, “The Experience of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Eastern Africa (AMECEA Region) in Light of the African Year of Reconciliation (AYR) from 29 July, 2015 to 29 July, 2016,” Nairobi: Privately photocopied, 2015. To be published in a booklet by SECAM.

³ José Ngalula, “History, Development and Statu Quo of Basic Christian Community (BCC) in Africa,” in Moerschbacher, Marco (ed.), *Proceedings of the International Symposium on In the World of Today? The Church on Her Way in Basic Christian Communities*, Tuebingen, Germany, 17-20 January, 2012, posted on the University of Tübingen Website at <http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/en/faculties/catholic-theology/lehrstuehle/religionspaedagogik/basisgemeinden-symposium/presentationen-der-vortraege.html>

listen to the voice of God through the unfolding of historical events of their lives. Carefully chosen wise women and men, whom we might call elders, may exercise the ministry of reconciliation. These elders can help the penitent in his or her effort to repair the brokenness (even in an invisible way) that his or her sin provoked. At this level God speaking through history can be the visible part of the process with the help of the elders of the community, the SCC.⁴

Local gatherings of SCCs/BCCs/CCBs Africa reflecting on their daily lives in light of the gospel can be a real theological locus or theological moment. Commenting on the important of CCBs Burkina Faso Archbishop Anselm Sanon, former Archbishop of Bobo Dioulasso Archdiocese, emphasized that "theology becomes again a community affair. African theologians must work with and within the Christian Communities."⁵ This can be summed up in the Burkina Faso proverb says, *If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk with others.*

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⁴ Paul Bere, "The Word of God as Transformative Power in Reconciling African Christians" in Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator (ed.), *Reconciliation, Justice and Peace – the Second Africa Synod*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011 and Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2011, p. 55.

⁵ Anselme Sanon, "Press Conference," *The African Synod*, 5, 2 (March/April, 1994, p. 14.