

“Planning Workshop on Networking among Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa”
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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

Part I: Brief History of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in AMECEA

The Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa (AMECEA)¹ consists of Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia (Somalia/Djibouti as affiliates).

AMECEA dates back to July 1961, when the first meeting of bishops was held in Tanzania to establish what was known as the Inter-territorial Episcopal Meeting of the Bishops of Eastern Africa (ITEBEA). This meeting was attended by fifty-one (51) bishops from five countries -- Kenya, Tanganyika (now Tanzania), Uganda, Nyasaland (now Malawi), and Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia).

It was in 1964, during the Second Vatican Council, that the bishops from Eastern Africa held a meeting to establish the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) with the Secretariat in Nairobi. Since then the bishops of AMECEA have held many Plenary Assemblies as the highest body to reflect on common pastoral challenges and offer responses to the arising needs of the church in the region. In July, 2014, the bishops held its 18th Plenary Assembly in Malawi under the theme “Evangelization through True Conversion.”

1. SCCs As a New Way of Being Church in Eastern Africa

The period after the Second Vatican Council initiated a strong movement towards a renewed ecclesiology for the church in the AMECEA region. It was understood that for the church, which is the sacrament of salvation and a sign of communion of believers, to be truly local, it is supposed to be experienced and lived in a particular place, influenced by culture and local conditions. For “it is in this actual, historical, local and particular situation that the universal Church is manifested and concretized” (Cf. *LG* 23, *AG* 19, 22). The bishops of

¹ AMECEA is an acronym for "Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa." It is a service organization for the National Episcopal Conferences of the nine English-speaking countries of Eastern Africa, namely Eritrea (1993), Ethiopia (1979), Kenya (1961), Malawi (1961), South Sudan (2011), Sudan (1973), Tanzania (1961), Uganda (1961) and Zambia (1961). The Republic of South Sudan became independent on 9 July, 2011, but the two Sudans remain part of one Episcopal Conference. Somalia (1995) and Djibouti (2002) are Affiliate Members. AMECEA is one of the eight Regional Episcopal Conferences of [SECAM](#) (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar).

AMECEA saw the need for the inculturation of the church so that it becomes truly the incarnation of the whole Mystical Body of Christ, the church of the New Testament within the context of the African people.

2. Plenary Assemblies of AMECEA Bishops

It was during the Plenary Assembly of December 1973 in Nairobi, Kenya, with the theme “Planning for the Church in Eastern Africa in the 1980s”, that the bishops of *AMECEA* resolved to embark on building the church that is truly local. The bishops proposed a shift in the ecclesial model from the Parish-Centered to “Church in the Neighborhood,” sharing the same way of life and living the Gospel values in the community. They said, “While the Church of Christ is universal, it is a communion of small local Christian churches, communities of Christians rooted in their society. [Such communities] are meant to grow so that with time they become firmly rooted in the life and culture of the people. It is led by the local people, meets and answers local needs and problems and finds within itself the resources for its life and mission” (*AFER*, 16-1/2, 1974, 9-10).

The bishops envisioned the church in Eastern Africa SCCs that is able to respond to the Gospel of Christ within the context of their community. The work of evangelization is not only for a few, but is the responsibility of all the members of the community who are endowed with different gifts.

In strongest terms possible, the bishops, during the 1973 Plenary declared their commitment stating: “We believe that in order to achieve this we have to insist on building church life and work on basic communities in both rural and urban areas. Church life must be based on the communities in which everyday life and work take place. Those basic and manageable social groupings whose members can experience real interpersonal relationships and feel a sense of communal belonging both in living and in working.” (*AFER*, 10)

During the July, 1976 AMECEA Plenary the Bishops further articulated the theology of SCCs under the theme: “Building Small Christian Communities.” The bishops focused on specific pastoral and theological areas in order to explain this ecclesial model to all local communities.

The Bishops discussed in depth the following topics: an overview on the building of SCCs; theological reflections on the objectives of SCCs; worship, the source and fullness of expression of SCCs; and the SCCs in life situations. It was at this assembly that the Bishop resolved to embark on a systematic formation of SCCs in all the AMECEA Countries. To express their conviction that this ecclesial model is relevant for the future of the Church, the bishops said, “The SCCs we are trying to build are simply the most local incarnations of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church” (*AFER* 18, 5, 1976, 249).

Since then, the deepening of the understanding of SCCs and the pastoral relevance of this ecclesial model has seen the involvement of the laity in the life of the church growing rapidly. In all the AMECEA Plenary Assemblies, the bishops have reiterated the importance of building the Church on SCCs as an ideal model for evangelization in the region.

3. The Benefit of SCCs as a New Way of Being Church

a. The SCCs are to foster a strong sense of identity and belonging:

What the Bishops of AMECEA envisaged was a church built around families or people living in those natural communities where life is lived and shared. It is these communities where members feel a strong sense of identity and belonging to the ethnic group, village or locality because people share the same culture, aspirations and anxieties. At the 1976 AMECEA Plenary, the bishops recommended that “SCCs are supposed to be small enough for the people to know each other on a personal level and to experience community fellowship with one another” (*AFER* 18/5 (1976), 270). It is for this reason that the bishops said that SCCs are the community of the baptized, and “it is the incarnation of the Body of Christ at the most elementary level of the Church.” In an ideal situation the SCC is supposed to be a community of Christian families living the same locality or neighborhood. In these communities people live together and share experiences and aspirations in life. These communities have been very beneficial to the life of the church in the AMECEA Countries.

b. The SCCs promote the sharing and celebration of life:

The AMECEA Bishops, during the 1976 Plenary emphasized that “SCCs are the natural communion of families in which life is received, lived, nurtured and enhanced, while anything that promotes or destroys life is experienced by all members of the community” (*AFER* 18/5, 271). In these natural communities, cultural life is transmitted with all the values attached to the meaning and purpose of life; human life is received, nurtured, initiation into adulthood in marriage and family life is shared with all social bonds strengthened. In times of social needs, human suffering, sickness and death, the SCCs become pillars of strength for individuals and families. Therefore the church becomes truly local and answers to the local needs of the people. “SCCs are not to be restricted to ecclesial functions, but ought to include the integral development of the human person, addressing the cultural and social needs, confronting the issues of injustice, promoting the common good and being part and parcel of the larger community.”

c. The SCCs promote prayer life and reverence for God:

The prayer meetings take place in the homes of the members of SCCs in a rotational manner. They meet weekly for common prayers, reflection and mutual action following the Lumko Steps of Reflection on the Word of God and other methods. This is putting prayer at the center of every activity in the SCCs and initiating children, youth and adults into an appreciation of the different models of praying. It is through prayer that God speaks to us in an intimate way. Members are encouraged to use events of their lives as occasions for prayer so that prayer is linked to what is happening in their lives.

d. SCCs are the place of nourishment by the Word of God:

When reflecting on the nature, life and mission of SCCs, the AMECEA Bishops emphasized the need to build community life on the Altar of the Word of God that should be a preparation for communion in the Eucharist. The Word of God is the source of life and inspiration by drawing people to participation in the sacramental life especially the Eucharist. Through SCCs, the reflection on the Word of God encourages members not only to be listeners but to be witnesses to the same word of God through their way of life. In this way the SCCs are not just prayer groups but focus on the personal/group reading, sharing of the Word of God and applying it to our daily lives. We need to help our people to see how this message of life can guide them in their life and give them inspiration and strength to be true disciples of Christ. We encourage our Christians to have personal *Bibles* and use them when

they meet in groups/SCCs to pray and share the Word of God. For the Scriptures are not only for the learned and the wise (*Luke* 10:21).

e. SCCs are places to promote and nurture vocations and ministries:

During the 1979 AMECEA Plenary Assembly the bishops said, “In SCCs, members assume ministries such as that of catechists, prayer leaders, visitors to the sick members, providing support to the needy, administration of pastoral structures and many others” (*AFER*, 21/5 (1979), 266). In this way the SCCs help to promote and nurture vocations and ministries at various levels of the life of the church. Members are helped to be conscious of this important role, to be proclaimers of the Word of God in their local community by word and way of life.

Some of the members are involved in the ministry of Christian formation or catechesis to prepare their members for sacraments, liturgical celebrations and service to the needy in the community.

Part II: Practical Examples of How Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Promote Reconciliation, Justice and Peace in Eastern Africa

and

Part III: The Involvement of Women in Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Promoting Reconciliation, Justice and Peace in Eastern Africa

came from the same common report below:

Practical examples of how Small Christian Communities (SCCs) promote reconciliation, justice and peace in Eastern Africa are seen in case studies, examples, quotations, stories and workshops/seminars.

The Small Christian Communities (SCCs) have stood up on key justice and peace issues in Eastern Africa in different ways. James O'Halloran reports:

According to animators in the field the [small] groups in Zambia played 'a considerable role' in that country's peaceful transition from one-party state to multi-party democracy. In Kenya too, during the 1993 elections, some ordinary [small] community members surprised politicians by speaking out on what they felt was for the good of the country.²

SCC members use African proverbs and sayings to promote justice and peace on the grassroots level. In challenging dictatorship and one person rule in Malawi the people use the Chewa (Malawi) and Nyanja (Zambia) proverb *One head does not hold up (or carry) a roof*. Another example is the Chewa (Malawi) and Nyanja (Zambia) proverb *One white ant does not build an ant hill*. . Conversely proverbs using the pattern "Two..." communicate unity, cooperation, strength, and success. Example: *Bangles sound when there are two* (Sena, Zambia). Another common pattern to communicate unity, cooperation, strength, and success are the African proverbs that begin "Many..." Example: *Many sticks burn together* (Swahili, Eastern and Central Africa).³

To encourage the SCCs values of unity, teamwork and cooperation there is the famous Amharic (Ethiopia) proverb *When spiders unite, they can tie up a lion*. Another version is *Enough spider webs wound together can stop a lion*. The Amara Ethnic Group in Addis Ababa and other parts of Ethiopia use this proverb in many different situations to emphasize the value, importance, power and strength of unity. Individually a person is weak,

² O'Halloran, *Living Cells*, p. 203.

³ Swahili is spoken in the following countries: Burundi, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Kenya, Libya, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Source: [Ethnologue: Africa](#).

but working together people are very strong. For example, if ordinary people work together they can overcome an unpopular leader like a dictator. A similar proverb is *When they work together strings of bark can tie up an elephant* (Oromo, Ethiopia proverb). Other examples of cooperation and sharing are: *One who encounters problems in a crowd will be helped* (Kaonde, Zambia proverb). *To stay together is brotherhood and sisterhood* (Tonga, Zambia proverb.).

The last nine years (from the 2006 *Lineamenta* of the Second African Synod to the present) has seen increasing involvement of SCCs in promoting forgiveness, healing reconciliation, justice and peace in Eastern Africa. The seeds were sown when the AMECEA SCCs pastoral priority was established in the 1970s. Christopher Mwoleka challenged SCCs members to go deeper. He emphasized that the person-centered and community values of African society can be both an asset and a liability. Emphasizing harmony in personal relationships above everything else can lead to superficial agreement and even an appeasement mentality at the expense of deeper sharing, change and healing. Sometimes only Christian communal (“fraternal” is sexist language) correction will help people to grow in the Christian life. "So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another" (*Ephesians* 4:25). Another translation is “speak the truth in love.” African Christians need to live out deeper Gospel values that sometimes go counter to certain traditional values of African culture.

This is part of a process of critiquing, self-evaluation and self-criticism in SCCs in the context of ongoing evaluation and assessment that leads to improvement and revision.

Laurenti Magesa points out:

Structurally, Small Christian Communities (SCCs) are capable of manifesting the sense of being church in Africa in many of its dimensions. Genuine inculturation requires that SCCs become truly respected as *theological* expressions of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. They should exercise freedom in terms of ministry and governance. The practice of justice in the church is best realized in SCCs when they are allowed to develop as the Spirit directs them. They should be allowed to develop structures of justice in society, with new ministries dictated by the needs of the place and hour. Again, the threefold qualities and mission of Jesus of kingship, priesthood and prophecy, received by every Christian at Baptism, are most practically and realistically exercised at this level. What we are engaged in with SCCs are not “political” but theological considerations, related to the most fundamental principle of the Christian life: the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church and in the world.⁴

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

⁴ Laurenti Magesa, *What is Not Sacred? African Spirituality*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013 and Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2014, pp. 190-91.

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.⁵

Today there are over 180,000 Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the Catholic Church in the nine AMECEA countries. Tanzania has over 60,000 SCCs and Kenya has over 45,000 SCCs. Since 1973 they have been a key pastoral priority in Eastern Africa as a “New Way of Being (Becoming) Church” and a “New Pastoral Model of Church.”⁶ The rich experience of the church in Eastern Africa especially pastoral, parish-based SCCs is contributing to the other parts of Africa and to the World Church. SCCs is a pastoral model of church integrally connected to the structures, ministries and activities of the parish. This helps local Catholics feel that “they are the church” and more responsible (“ownership”) for church life and decision making. SCCs are becoming more involved in justice and peace issues.

Kenya provides a unique Case Study. When Kenya plunged into a wave of riots and violence in January, 2008 much of the unrest was fueled by tribalism and negative ethnicity.⁷ This dramatically affected the thousands of SCCs too. But some communities and people rose above the crisis. Some SCCs in Kenya became effective local tribunals to mediate tribal and ethnic conflicts. A three member mediation team was formed in St. Joseph the Worker Parish, Kangemi in Nairobi Archdiocese. First, a member of St. Augustine SCC visited all 28 SCCs in the parish during a three month period to learn where the conflicts existed. The team itself came from three different SCCs and was a mixed group consisting of two men and one woman – one Kamba, one Kikuyu and one Luyia. They visited the specific SCCs that had the conflicts to promote the healing of their ethnic tensions and promote reconciliation and peace. The team especially encouraged the SCC members to talk about their problems and feelings. Later members of five SCCs participated in a mass in the parish hall to offer thanksgiving for the reconciliation and peace that had taken place. Up until today peace and harmony continue among the SCC members.⁸

⁵ 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.

⁶ See the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website and “Facebook Page” www.smallchristiancommunities.org

⁷ Examples are given in Joseph G. Healey, “New Learnings in Animating a Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Model of Church in Africa Today,” in *African Christian Studies* (CUEA), Vol. 24: No. 2 (June, 2008), pp. 13-17.

⁸ Based on Simon Rurinjah’s conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya on 28 August, 2012 and various presentations in the SCCs Class at Tangaza University College.

St. Martin de Porres SCC in Holy Trinity Parish, Buruburu I in Nairobi Archdiocese had a similar experience – a critical incident⁹ -- when two women of different ethnic groups (Luo and Taita) argued/quarreled/had an emotional exchange over the tense Kenyan situation and stopped going to each other homes for the SCCs meetings because of their anger. Other SCCs members helped them to resolve their differences after several meetings.¹⁰ During the SCC Course at Hekima College Rose Musimba, a SCC Coordinator in Holy Trinity Parish and a member of St. Martin de Porres SCC, said: "My recommendation is that people should sit and air their views on the political situations and ethnic divisions expressing where they are hurting and letting it out in the open so that tensions can be reduced to foster communication. There should be real dialog among SCC members."

A report on the peacebuilding process in the 35 SCCs in five subparishes in Christ the King Parish in Kibera in Nairobi recommended:

Carry out reconciliation prayer services and rites. During such ceremonies you may use symbols of reconciliation that are similar among the different ethnic groups and are rich in meaning. Examples include the use of reconciliation plants or trees, the use of stones (many meanings), having meals together with meat from ritual animals, gestures of peace for the kiss of peace during the Eucharist and encourage the choir to compose and sing songs of reconciliation and peace.¹¹

I personally belong to St. Kizito SCC in Waruku (an informal settlement area near Kangemi) in St. Austin's Parish, Nairobi, Kenya. We had a dispute between two SCC women members of different ethnic groups (Kamba and Luo) over favoritism in the financial contributions to the families of deceased members in the community. The Luo woman claimed that the SCC's bereavement collection was greater for the deceased person in the Kamba woman's family than for her own family. When the dispute could not be resolved through the normal dialog and *palaver*, we had a special Reconciliation Service in the SCC with a relevant *Bible* reading, prayers, the laying on of hands and the exchange of peace. The issue was finally resolved after months of prayer and dialog. The two women are friends again.

Storytelling (that can lead to African Narrative Theology) is particularly effective.¹² Stories and examples from Eastern Africa are found in Chapter Three on "Church as the

⁹ "Critical incident" is a specific term used in Pastoral Theological Reflection (PTR). It refers to a significant real-life event/situation that is more than a passing anecdote or story. It carries a seriousness/gravity that leads to deeper analysis and action/change/transformation.

¹⁰ Based on Rose Musimba's conversations with the author in Nairobi, Kenya in 2010 and 2011.

¹¹ Hillary Awiti, MHM (complier), "Suggestions on the Peacebuilding Process in Christ the King Parish, Kibera, Nairobi, Kenya, Nairobi: Unpublished Paper, 2009.

¹² Tina Beattie describes Pope Francis' theological method as "a privileging of narrative and storytelling (a theology of the people) over dogmatics and systematics (a theology of the scholars), which comes from his Argentinian background," Towards Faith, Hope and Love," 30 October 2014, *Tablet*, retrieved on 1 November, 2014, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/3761/towards-faith-hope-and-love>

[Extended] Family of God” in our book *Towards an African Narrative Theology* that is published by Paulines Publications Africa and Orbis Books. Starting with the experience and context of SCCs in Eastern Africa we are developing a contextualized and inculturated African ecclesiology.

The “African Stories Database” of the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website (www.afriprov.org) contains 585 African stories. For an example of inspiring stories about women in peacemaking in SCCs in Eastern Africa, listen to “I Am a Christian First:”

After the post December, 2007 election crisis and the resulting tribalism-related violence in Kenya in early 2008, a Catholic woman in a St. Paul Chaplaincy Center Prayer Group (a type of SCC) in Nairobi said: "I am a Christian first, a Kenyan second and a Kikuyu third."¹³

Another story is “Pray for Me to Forgive President Mwai Kibaki:”

During a meeting of the St. Jude South Small Christian Community (SCC) near the main highway going to Uganda in Yala Parish in Kisumu Archdiocese, Kenya in March, 2008 the members reflected on the Gospel passage from *John 20:23*: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Speaking from the heart one Luo man emotionally asked the SCC members to pray for him. He said: "Pray for me to forgive President Mwai Kibaki." During the post-election crisis period in Kenya he said that every time he saw the Kikuyu president on TV he got upset and angry and so he needed healing. The other SCCs members were deeply touched and feelingly prayed for him and laid hands on him. He said that he felt peaceful again.¹⁴

These two short, powerful stories are a ringing challenge to tribalism and negative ethnicity and can be the starting point of an African Theology of Reconciliation and Peace.

Another story, “Celebrating a Jumuiya Mass in Nairobi, Kenya,” describes how to celebrate unity and diversity among Kenyan ethnic groups:

¹³ African Story No. 177 in the “African Stories Database,” African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved 20 August, 2014, [http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-database.html?task=display2&cid\[0\]=610](http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-database.html?task=display2&cid[0]=610)
Also SCCs Story No. 2 in the “SCCs Stories Database,” Small Christian Community Global Collaborative Website, retrieved 20 August, 2014, [http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/sccs-stories.html?task=display2&cid\[0\]=628](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/sccs-stories.html?task=display2&cid[0]=628)
This order does not diminish the importance of positive ethnicity and the values of African cultural roots but expresses priorities. In the genuine dialog between Christian Faith and African culture it is both/and rather than either/or.

¹⁴ Story No. 336 in the “African Stories Database,” African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved 20 August, 2014, [http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-database.html?task=display2&cid\[0\]=603](http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-database.html?task=display2&cid[0]=603)
Also SCCs Story No. 5 in the “SCCs Stories Database,” Small Christian Community Global Collaborative Website, retrieved 20 August, 2014, [http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/sccs-stories.html?task=display2&cid\[0\]=624](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/sccs-stories.html?task=display2&cid[0]=624)

To celebrate the official beginning of 18 new SCCs in Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish (Adams Arcade), Nairobi, Kenya (thus increasing from 21 SCCs to 39 SCCs), all the outstation masses were cancelled and there was one large, outdoor mass of over 1,000 people at the parish center on Pentecost Sunday, 11 May, 2008. A banner highlighted the theme of the day: "Holy Spirit Set Our Hearts on Fire." The plan of the mass emphasized the meaning of Pentecost in the context of the challenges of the present tribalism and negative ethnicity in Kenya today. A new learning was the mutual enrichment of the values of unity and diversity, that is, a both/and approach rather than an either/or approach. Unity is an important value in the worldwide Catholic Church and in African society. Diversity is an important value in the inculturation of the Catholic Church to become a genuine World Church and in the rich cultural heritage of the African people that is reflected in their many languages, customs and traditions.

The Penitential Rite invited the congregation to privately name some of the evil things that happened during the 2008 post-election violence, ask for forgiveness from God and commit oneself to help heal these situations. The homily was in buzz groups of two people each sharing on the question: "What gift of the Holy Spirit is most important to me?" In a ritual that took almost one half hour members of the congregation spontaneously offered 25 Prayers of the Faithful in their heart languages (not necessarily their mother tongues) including: Gusii, Kamba, Gikuyu, Lingala, Luganda, Luhya (Bukusu, etc.), Luo, Rwanda, Swahili, Taita and Teso as well as English and French.

The *Our Father* was prayed twice. First, in different languages simultaneously to imitate the rich diversity of the first Pentecost and the rich cultural diversity of the languages spoken in Kenya. Second, everyone together in Swahili to model the unity in our church and in our country. The Exchange of Peace used the symbols of a single "clap" and then a handshake. The lively mass that focused on community (*jumuiya* in Swahili) was filled with singing and processions.¹⁵

Tanzanian Augustinian of the Assumption seminarian Leonard Michael Shayo states:

In a traditional African family we used to gather around the fire and listen to stories from the elders. These African stories were used as paradigms in transmitting virtues like courage, accountability and generosity among others. I suggest that we can meet in our SCCs and tell stories on the themes

¹⁵ SCCs Story No. 1 in the "SCCs Stories Database," Small Christian Community Global Collaborative Website, retrieved 28 October, 2013, [http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/sccs-stories.html?task=display2&cid\[0\]=623](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/sccs-stories.html?task=display2&cid[0]=623)
Also African Story No. 75 in the "African Stories Database," African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved 20 August, 2014, [http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/resources/storiesdatabase.html?task=display2&cid\[0\]=49](http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/resources/storiesdatabase.html?task=display2&cid[0]=49)

of justice, reconciliation and peace...People, especially the youth, will be fascinated with the images that are embedded in the stories told.¹⁶

The famous Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe (who died in 2013) inspires SCC members to tell their stories:

There is that great African proverb – *that until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter*. That did not come to me until much later. Once I realized that, I had to be a writer. I had to be that historian. It is not one person's job. But it is something we have to do, so that that story of the hunt will also reflect the agony, the travail, the bravery even of the lions.

Some SCCs on the grassroots in Eastern Africa are involved in an African style of restorative justice rather than retributive (punitive) justice. The Second African Synod Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortative *Africa's Commitment* in Number 83 under "The Good Governance of States" states that "pastoral workers have the task of studying and recommending restorative justice as a means and a process for promoting reconciliation, justice and peace, and the return of victims and offenders to the community." When disputes and conflicts arise, SCC members use a *palaver* style of conversation, discussion and dialog to resolve the problems. It involves establishing right relationships and the healing of all parties. Sometimes this process uses symbols and signs of African culture as well as songs, role plays and skits.

Here is a Case Study of Tegeti Parish. In 2008 Kenyan layman and evangelist Simon Rurinjah, a member of our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team, was invited to the new Parish of Tegeti (that had been divided from Longisa Parish) in Kericho Diocese, Kenya by Father Daniel, the Parish Priest, to be a mediator in a dispute between the Kalenjin and Kikuyu Ethnic Groups.¹⁷ This dispute involved the Kalenjin people burning the houses and stealing the cattle of the Kikuyu people during the January-February, 2008 post-election crisis in Kenya. The Kikuyu fled from the area and then later came back to their homesteads.

In April, 2008 with the elders (both men and women) present there was a week of mediation on the parish and outstation levels of the families of the two ethnic groups concerned that had intermarried over the years. On the last day seven SCCs gathered to participate in a forgiveness and reconciliation ceremony. Prayers were said by each ethnic group. As part of the compensation and restorative justice the Kalenjins rebuilt the houses and returned the cattle of the Kikuyu as a fine for their original wrongdoing.

Then nine months later in 2009 there was a special Reconciliation Mass with prayers in both the Kalenjin and Gikuyu languages. Everyone in the SCCs participated in a communal meal of reconciliation with both Kalenjin and Kikuyu food served and eaten by

¹⁶ Leonard Shayo, "How SCCs Promote Justice, Reconciliation and Peace in Kenya," Nairobi: Unpublished Paper, 2013, p. 10.

¹⁷ Our SCCs Training Team is exploring the possibility of a Reconciliation and Peace Workshop in the SCCs of the Samburu and Turkana Ethnic Groups in Baragoi Parish, Maralal Diocese, Kenya.

the whole community. Everyone agreed that this violence and wrongdoing should never happen again. Until today (August, 2015) the peace continues and the local people are forgetting the past disputes.¹⁸

After the post-election violence in Kenya in 2008 the People for Peace in Africa (PPA) Office in Nairobi facilitated three workshops on the “Role of Small Christian Communities in Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution.” Participants were: Catechists and SCCs Leaders. Yala Catholic Church, Kisumu, Kenya. 29-30 March, 2008. Kenyan Diocesan Priests in Siaya Deanery, Kisumu Archdiocese. Yala Catholic Church, Kisumu, Kenya. 31 March, 2008. Provincial, district, divisional and location police officers in the Peace Support Program in the North and South Rift Region. Royal Springs Hotel, Nakuru, Kenya. 13 June, 2008. SCCs processes/methodologies (especially "See," "Judge" and "Act") were used to reconcile and to bring healing to ethnic communities that were not relating to each other. This process concerned especially the Luo people (perceived to be Raila Odinga followers) and the Kikuyu people (perceived to be Mwai Kibaki followers) in areas that were badly hit by violence.

The People for Peace in Africa (PPA) Office also facilitated a “Reconciliation and Peacebuilding Workshop” for Kenyan children of different ethnic groups on a primary school grounds in Kiambu, Kenya and organized by a Kenyan storyteller. African proverbs, sayings and stories were used to emphasize the importance of community, unity, reconciliation and peace. The message to the children was the goodness of staying united as Kenyans and how to forgive and reunite after the post-election violence. All the children exchanged a sign of peace and unity at the end. This was symbolized in the 2008 Kenyan Lenten campaign poster of “Hands United Together.”

A Reconciliation and Peacebuilding Seminar for the Small Christian Community leaders of Christ the King Catholic Parish took place in Kibera, Nairobi, Kenya on Saturday, 7 March 2009. Tribalism, negative ethnicity, poverty, insecurity, instability and corruption are frequent in the urban slums. There was a role play on the causes of instability in the Kibera slum. Kibera is a very populous slum located in Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya and its inhabitants come from almost all the ethnic groups in Kenya. The residents live from hand to mouth in desperate conditions such as poor infrastructures. Their main concern is to meet their very basic human needs. Due to this diversity and vulnerability it was one of the hot spots of the post-election violence in 2008 with examples of tribalism, negative ethnicity, instability and other problems. Hence the need for a reconciliation and peacebuilding seminar.

Some special *Bible* readings on Reconciliation, Justice and Peace that are used in SCCs in an African context include *Galatians* 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” that is especially meaningful in the context of overcoming tribalism and negative ethnicity in our SCCs. This text from *Galatians* is rewritten in Kenya and in our SCCs today to read:

¹⁸ Based on Simon Rurinjah’s conversations with the author in Nairobi, Kenya on 23 February, 2012 and 24 August, 2012. See “Seven SCCs Participate in a Forgiveness and Reconciliation Ceremony in Kenya,” SCCs Story No. 6 in the “SCCs Stories Database”, Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website, retrieved 28 August, 2012, [http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/sccs-stories.html?task=display2&cid\[0\]=630](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/sccs-stories.html?task=display2&cid[0]=630)

“There is neither Kikuyu nor Luo, there is neither Christian nor Muslim, there is neither Catholic nor Protestant, there is neither married or unmarried, there is neither rich nor poor, there is neither educated nor uneducated, there is neither city dweller nor rural dweller, there is neither Kenyan nor foreigner (expatriate), there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Other relevant texts on forgiveness, healing, reconciliation and peacemaking are: *Ephesians* 4:32: “Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ.” *Luke* 23:34: “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” *Matthew* 5:9: “St. are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God.”

The Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website and “Facebook Page” (www.smallchristiancommunities.org) documents many examples and case studies of SCCs that are involved in social and mission outreach and in promoting reconciliation, justice and peace in Africa. See in particular the free, online Ebook:

Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa, Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications – CUEA Press Double *Spearhead* Nos. 199-200 (Print Version 2012 and 1st Reprint 2014). 163 pages. The Online Digital Version regularly updated from the 2012 print version is available as a free online Ebook containing 648 pages as of 19 August, 2015 on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website at:
<http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/ebooks/47-ebooks-.html>
http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build_new.pdf

The SCCs Facebook Page has 1,445 members as of 19 August. 2015.

One challenge is equality and human rights. In interviews Catholic women (in Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Nairobi, Kenya and other places) have said: “In the hierarchical, clerical Catholic Church in Kenya we women feel at the bottom. This is reinforced by traditional African customs and traditions where women are second class. But in the SCCs we feel that we women are equals and have a voice.”¹⁹ Often women take leaderships roles in the SCCs and are very active in committees and SCCs activities. Research in Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan and Sudan indicates that women are better in peacemaking than men. Men tend to emphasize power and control while women emphasize personal relationships.

Especially through the East African Community (EAC) and the growing use of English Rwanda is working closer with the countries of Eastern Africa. American writer layman Jeffrey Odell Korgen documents how some of the 20,000 base communities (another name for SCCs) were involved in the reconciliation and healing ministry in Rwanda after the 2004 genocide.²⁰

¹⁹ “We Women Are Equals and Have a Voice,” African Story No. 538 in the “African Stories Database”, African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved on 13 March, 2011, [http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-database.html?task=display2&cid\[0\]=615](http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-database.html?task=display2&cid[0]=615)

²⁰ See the powerful Rwandan Case Study called "Forgiving the Unforgivable: Peacemaking in Rwanda," in *Solidarity Will Transform the World: Stories of Hope from Catholic Relief Services*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007, pp. 97-122.

Rwandan Bishop Antoine Kambanda of Kibungo Diocese describes how neighborhood base communities meet weekly to try to resolve conflicts such as a husband beating a wife and other family disputes. These base communities promote reconciliation and peace on the grassroots level. Women are elected leaders of the BCs and are effective peacemakers.

Documents from the Second African Synod refer to “Rites of Reconciliation” in SCCs and state that SCCs open roads or paths to peace. More and more healing and reconciliation services, rituals and ceremonies are being integrated into SCC masses, Bible Services, meetings, workshops and seminars in Eastern Africa.

Examples of symbols of forgiveness, healing, reconciliation, and peace include:

First, are the universal symbols such as a white dove, olive branch, white flag, handshake, embrace, food and drink (especially beer).

Second, are the particular national symbols. In Kenya these include the national flag, the national anthem, a map of Kenya, songs in the national languages and the Swahili word *harambee* that means “let us pull together.”

Third, are the specific African cultural symbols of sorrow, repentance, forgiveness, healing, reconciliation and peace that traditionally are “sacred” signs of sorrow, repentance, forgiveness, healing, reconciliation and peace.²¹ Perhaps the most common symbol/ ceremony/ritual used in many ethnic groups in Africa is eating a meal together and drinking the local beer/wine/beverage together from the same calabash/bowl. Sometimes a fine is paid by the offending party. Some specific examples:

1. Acholi, Uganda: *Mato Oput* Ceremony of drinking a bitter root (community reconciliation ceremony between the clans). Stepping on an egg (welcoming a person back into the community).²²
2. Bemba, Zambia: blood and flour.
3. Bukusu (Luyia), Kenya: joint meal including drinking local beer from a common pot.
4. Chagga, Tanzania: green isale leaf itself; and isale tree, a special reconciliation tree,²³ a white goat and even a baby.

²¹ See Healey, Joseph and Donald Sybertz. *Towards an African Narrative Theology* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa and Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), p. 286.

²² For a full explanation of the *Mato Oput* Ceremony see “Ethnical Foundations for Africa Traditional Reconciliation Mechanisms: A Case Study of the Uganda *Mato Oput* Process” by Menanga Kizito Yves in *The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: In the Light of the Second Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops* (Nairobi, Kenya, CUEA Publications, 2008), pp. 158-176.

²³ See "Searching for a Symbol of Reconciliation," Joseph Healey (compiled), *Once Upon a Time in Africa: Stories of Wisdom and Joy*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004, p. 101 and as Africa Story No. 360 in the African Stories Database on the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved on 19 August, 2014, [http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-database.html?task=display2&cid\[0\]=138](http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-database.html?task=display2&cid[0]=138).

5. Ethnic groups in Cameroun: palm wine.
6. Ethnic groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): bowing heads and crossing arms on breast as a sign of sorrow (see the Zaire Rite).
7. Ethnic groups in Ghana: putting the back of one's right hand into the palm of one's right hand.
8. Ethnic groups in Zambia: relaxing a tightly closed fist.
9. Jita, Tanzania: local beer and a meal.
10. Kalenjin, Kenya: drinking together from a gourd of fermented milk (*mursik* in Kalenjin).
11. Maasai, Kenya and Tanzania and Samburu, Kenya: special green tuft of grass; spittle.
12. Marakwet, Kenya: green leaves; a belt of cowry shells.
13. Mende, Sierra Leone and ethnic groups in South Sudan and Sudan: simultaneously two people put their right hands on the other person's left shoulder while saying "Peace." South Sudan and Sudan liturgical dancers also use this symbol in a dance during Eucharistic Celebrations.
14. Pökot²⁴ and Turkana, Kenya; Logir, South Sudan: breaking a spear.
15. Sabaot, Kenya: breaking a stick.
16. Sukuma, Tanzania: spittle.
17. Toposa, South Sudan: two people exchange double embrace followed by shaking hands.

A key is when the different ethnic groups share the same symbols and reconciliation rites, for example, eating each other's food and drink.

Many of these symbols are used in the Exchange of Peace, the last step of the weekly *Bible Service* in the SCCs and in the Exchange of Peace during Mass such as a SCC Mass (*Jumuiya Mass*). This SCC Mass is celebrated in a home and has its unique characteristics and style.

Another Case Study is the SCCs' campaign against Human Trafficking during the 2011 Kenya Lenten Campaign. First, our SCCs class at Tangaza University College used the three steps of "See," "Judge" and Act" for Week 1 (First Sunday of Lent – 13 March, 2011).²⁴ Our whole class read:

1. The story in Step One ("See"): "A New Slavery – Another Story to Tell..." about the innocent teenage girl named Una who became a victim of sexual exploitation.
2. Gospel (*Matthew* 4:1-11) and Scripture commentary.
3. Situational Analysis in Step Two ("Judge").

²⁴ See the very interesting field research carried out for six months (March – August, 2002) in nine SCCs, one in each of the nine parishes in Kitale Diocese in the West Pökot District in the northwestern part of Kenya. *Biblical Hermeneutics as a Tool for Inculturation in Africa: A Case Study of the Pökot People of Kenya*. David J. Ndegwah (Nairobi, Kenya: Creation Enterprises, 2007).

We discussed the problem in our four class SCCs and then answered questions in Step Three (“Act”) such as: “How can your SCC be involved in raising awareness against human trafficking?”²⁵ Then class members visited various parish-based SCCs in Nairobi during the following week. Many SCC members said that young girls have been brought from the rural areas into the city with the promise of work, a good salaried job and further education. Then they are used as almost slave labor (house girls with almost no salary) and even sexually abused. Other cases were told of Kenyan girls lured overseas and forced into prostitution. Many SCC members realized the seriousness of this problem for the first time and promised to alert other people.

An important new addition to the annual Kenya Lenten Campaign is the booklet *Lent: Let Light Shine Out of Darkness... Kenya Lenten Campaign Training Manual for Small Christian Communities* produced by the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission of the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops in February, 2012. In the “Preface” Archbishop Zacchaeus Okoth, Chairman of Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, states:

This manual will therefore provide information for the Small Christian Communities on Lent and the Lenten Campaign. This is in recognition that the future of the Catholic Church will be one built from the grassroots. This will be possible through the existence of Small Christian Communities and the realization of the Church as a Family Model community of believers which reflects the ecclesiology of communion of Vatican II.²⁶

Section III is on “Lenten Campaign Training for Small Christian Communities” and clearly explains how to use the Lenten Campaign Information Education and Communication (IEC) materials to create awareness and for advocacy during the Lenten period. These materials include the *Bible*; Lenten Campaign Poster; Lenten Campaign Booklet; and any other advocacy materials depending on the theme and specific context in a diocese/parish. Focus is on the weekly meetings and activities of the Small Christian Community Sharing Groups.

This SCCs Manual is being used to promote SCCs’ involvement in the Kenya Lenten Campaign 2012 on the theme *Towards a Transformed Kenya: Let Light Shine out of Darkness*.²⁷ There is a campaign to promote civic education before the Kenya General

²⁵ “Bishop Martin Kivuva of Machakos, near Nairobi, is supporting a project which involves the Small Christian Communities in awareness, victim support, focusing on the most vulnerable, together with developing programs that will eventually raise the standard of living and provide appropriate sustainability.” English Missionary Sister of Our Lady of Africa Maggi Kennedy, MSOLA, “Human Trafficking...21st Century Slaves -- the Silent Epidemic...Our Story--Our Challenge,” New Slavery Conference, Rome: Unpublished Paper, 11 November, 2012, p. 12.

²⁶ Zacchaeus Okoth in Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, *Lent: Let Light Shine Out of Darkness... Kenya Lenten Campaign Training Manual for Small Christian Communities*, Nairobi: KCCB Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, 2012, p. 4.

²⁷ See the booklet Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, *Towards a Transformed Kenya: Let Light Shine Out of Darkness*, Kenya Lenten Campaign, 2012, Nairobi: KCCB Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, 2012.

Elections. This includes training SCC Leaders to use the inductive "See," "Judge" and Act" process and facilitating "Training of Trainers" (TOT) Workshops in our parishes and SCCs. Week 1 (First Sunday of Lent – 26 February, 2012) focuses on "General Elections: Our Country, Our Leaders, Our Responsibility."²⁸ SCCs are encouraged to:

1. Analyze and discuss the drawing (cartoon) on page 8.²⁹
2. Read the story in Step One ("See"): "Another Season is here for Songa Country."
3. Read part of the Situational Analysis in Step Two ("Judge")
4. Read the Gospel (*Mark 1:12-15*) and Scripture commentary.
5. Answer question 4 in Step Three ("Act") that includes:
 - a. What is required to be a voter?
 - b. How can you participate in the next General Election as a Small Christian Community?
 - c. What is your role to insure peaceful elections as a Small Christian Community?

Another important civic education resource produced by the KCCB Catholic Justice and Peace Commission is *The Leadership Handbook* (Swahili is *Maelekezo ya Uongozi*). The "Guidelines on the Use of the Handbook" state:

The leadership handbook like the Lenten Campaign handbooks that the church produces annually will help Small Christian Communities to reflect on their role towards determining the kind of leaders Kenya should have for effective service delivery. As individuals and Small Christian Communities we are asked to use this small handbook to reflect on leadership in our country in the light of the new constitution and the Social Teachings of the Church.³⁰

This handbook uses clever, humorous and effective cartoons by the cartoonist of the *Standard* newspaper in Kenya to teach civic education. For example, in a two page spread entitled "At a meeting at the market place" four overweight politicians makes false promises to the citizen voters related to buying votes, violation of women's rights and fomenting tribalism.

These printed materials can be effectively used with the dramatic DVD *Never Again! Never again should Kenya walk the path of the 2007-2008 post-election violence* produced by Ukweli Video Productions. The 70-minute DVD provides firsthand accounts of a number of Kenyans who were directly and indirectly affected by the 2007-2008 post-election violence.

²⁸ Explained in "Kenya: Lent 2012, 'Let Light Shine Out of Darkness,'" *Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns NewsNotes*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (March-April 2012), Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC) Website, retrieved 10 July, 2012, <http://www.maryknollogc.org/newsnotes/37.2/Kenya.html>

²⁹ Kenyan Youth Groups perform little plays and skits based on these cartoons as part of the Sunday Homilies.

³⁰ Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, *The Leadership Handbook* (Swahili is *Maelekezo ya Uongozi*), Nairobi: KCCB Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, 2012.

The DVD asks what lessons have we learned as Kenya prepares for the 2013 General Election. The DVC can be shown in segments in SCCs followed by questions and discussion.

Another perspective on how SCCs promote justice and equality is seen in this story from Tanzania “Let Us All Sit around the Table in a Big Circle and Eat Together”:

Sometimes Christian values in our SCCs challenge African cultural values. After a Small Christian Communities Workshop in Geita Diocese, Tanzania everyone gathered in one of the SCC members’ home for the traditional closing meal. Following the custom of the local Sukuma Ethnic Group the men sat in a circle around the table. The women served and then ate sitting in the back of the room. One person politely challenged this custom saying: “We have just finished a workshop where everyone participated equally. Now we eat in a way that makes women second class. Let everyone sit around the table in a big circle and eat together. And so it was done. This was a real learning experience for all the men and women present.”³¹

An on-going challenge is witchcraft and superstition. A 2011 report from Malindi Diocese in Kenya states: “In some villages in the diocese there are still strong beliefs in superstition and witchcraft. Some interviewees said they shy away from the SCCs because of the suspicion that some members actively practice witchcraft. They feel witchcraft could affect their lives, business and family.”³² The 2011 AMECEA Study Session discussed at length the problems of witchcraft and superstition and passed two resolutions to fight devil worship and witchcraft. In the AMECEA countries SCCs are involved in reconciliation related to cases of witchcraft and superstition. This has been an important ministry in Zambia for many years.

The most recent initiative is the “Yes, Kenya Matters Campaign” that is a new online resource to promote civic education before the Kenya General Election in March, 2013. These are “Weekly Reflections for the 2012-2013 Election Year” inspired by the Bible Readings of each Sunday. These reflections are circulated by the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission (JPIC) Commission of Religious Superiors Conference of Kenya (RSCK) free every week for personal prayer, for homilies and for SCC meetings.

³¹ “Let Us All Sit Around the Table in a Big Circle and Eat Together” Story No. 256 in the “African Stories Database,” African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved 23 November, 2011, [http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-database.html?task=display2&cid\[0\]=629](http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-database.html?task=display2&cid[0]=629). SCCs Story No. 3 in the “SCCs Stories Database,” Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website, retrieved 23 November, 2011, [http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/sccs-stories.html?task=display2&cid\[0\]=625](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/sccs-stories.html?task=display2&cid[0]=625) and in “Missioner Tales,” *Maryknoll Magazine*, January-February, 2014, p. 9., *Maryknoll Magazine Website*, retrieved on 26 February, 2014, <http://www.maryknollmagazine.org/index.php/magazines/472-missioner-tales-january-february-2014>

³² Ndichia Anthony Ndong, MHM, *The Role of SCCs in Mission and Evangelization in Malindi Diocese, Kenya*, Unpublished Long Essay, Tangaza University College (CUEA), 2011, p. 56.

The section on “Kenya Matters: Kenyan Life Focus” and “Questions for Personal and Community Reflection” for the 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time B (5 August, 2012) stated:

The tens of thousands of *Jumuiya* in our country can be a tremendous force to promote the values of the Gospel we are discussing here: they can offer a meaningful contribution to help us be more attentive to the environment, water, more equitable sharing of goods and riches, etc...What can we do in order to make our meetings in our *Jumuiya* and our Sunday Eucharistic Celebrations more relevant? For example, how can these faith gatherings become opportunities of enhancing our spirit of solidarity with those in need?³³

Members of St. Kizito Small Christian Community (SCC) in the Waruku Section of St. Austin’s Parish in Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya contributed the reflections for the Fifth Sunday of Easter B (6 May, 2012). To the question “How can you participate in the next General Election as an individual/Small Christian Community/Community?” they answered: “As the Kenya National Anthem suggests let justice be our shield and defender and may we dwell in unity, peace and liberty. As SCC members we are branches of our Kenya Government on the grassroots to promote peace and unity with our brothers and sisters. During this Election Year in Kenya it is our responsibility in our SCCs to promote civic education on the local level.”³⁴

The reflections for the Third Sunday of Lent C (3 March 2013) stated: “In Kenya we are in the middle of the 2013 Lenten campaign to prepare for the general elections tomorrow, Monday, March 4. After the terrible post-election violence in 2008, can Kenya elect a new president and government in peaceful, just and fair elections? We realize the whole world is watching.” The reflections continued:

The overall theme of the 2013 Kenya Lenten Campaign is “United and Peaceful Kenya: The Change I Want to See.” The specific theme for this third Sunday of Lent is “county governance.” The 2010 Kenya Constitution provides for a devolved governance structure that sets up 47 counties that are guided by democratic principles, separation of powers and reliable sources of income to facilitate local development.

The Lenten campaign booklet uses a “See,” “Judge” and “Act” methodology or process to reflect on these issues. Catholics in their local groups, such as the 45,000 Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Kenya, are encouraged to reflect on such questions as: “How can we, as Small Christian Communities, contribute to good governance in the Church and our counties?”

³³ 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time B (5 August, 2012), Christ the Teacher Parish-KU Website, retrieved on 31 July, 2012, <http://www.kucatholic.or.ke/index.php/component/content/article/39-yes-kenya-matters/107-18th-sunday-in-ordinary-time-b-august-5-2012-.html>

³⁴ Fifth Sunday of Easter B (6 May, 2012), Christ the Teacher Parish-KU Website, retrieved on 31 July, 2012, <http://www.kucatholic.or.ke/index.php/component/content/article/39-yes-kenya-matters/92-fifth-sunday-of-easter-b-6-may-2012.html>

We are challenged to participate in civic education programs and to study and reflect on the qualities of good leaders.³⁵

The 2013 Kenya Lenten campaign mobilized SCCs throughout the country to get involved in civic education and voter education. This included: participating in "Workshops on Civic Education and Voter Education;" using the three steps of "See," "Judge" and "Act" to go deeper in analyzing the key Kenyan election issues and try to elect leaders with good morals and integrity (as stated in the "Kenya Lenten Campaign Booklet"); using the "Prayer for Peaceful Elections in Kenya" prepared by the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission of the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) as part of a novena (prayer for nine days) leading up to the elections; and SCC members being monitors/observers/agents at the Polling Stations in the 4 March, 2013 General Elections.

These shifts to SCCs in Africa being more out-going and more involved in justice and peace issues in the public life can be described in a term borrowed from the SCCs in the USA: "The Public Life of Small Christian Communities." Lee, American psychologist/theologian Michael Cowan and others have written about the inner life of SCCs (when SCC members gather) and the public life of SCCs (when SCC members are sent).³⁶ While social concern is a high value, actual social involvement is low. There is a need to focus more intentionally on the relation of faith to the larger world and its needs. There is a power in small communities to help transform the world. SCCs members are responding more to the radical message of the Gospel and its call for social justice. SCCs members are called to be intentional disciples and intentional evangelists of Jesus Christ.

A clear challenge to African SCCs is found in the famous quotation from No. 6 of *Justice in the World*, the final document of the 1971 World Synod of Bishops: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of preaching the Gospel or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation."

As an example of responding to the signs of the times, in January, 2013 I began teaching a ten-week seminar on "Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa Today"³⁷ at Hekima College, Nairobi. The aim was to examine how Small Christian Communities (SCCs) are a New Model of Church and a New Way of Being Church in promoting justice, reconciliation and peace in Africa today.

³⁵ These reflections were circulated widely through many Email Mailing Lists and websites. For example, the Third Sunday of Lent C (3 March 2013), Christ the Teacher Parish-KU Website, retrieved on 3 March, 2013, <http://www.kucatholic.or.ke/index.php/component/content/article/39-yes-kenya-matters/138-third-sunday-of-lent-year-c-3-march-2013.html>

³⁶ See Michael Cowan and Bernard Lee, SM, *Conversation, Risk, and Conversion: The Inner & Public Life of Small Christian Communities*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997. Bernard Lee and Michael Cowan. *Gathered and Sent: The Mission of Small Church Communities Today*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003.

³⁷ Listed under the area "Methodologies of Evangelization."

One of our most interesting discussions was on the best order of words in the reconciliation and peacemaking process. We discovered that the word order used in the process of peacemaking/peacebuilding is very important, yet varies. The theme of the 2009 Second African Synod was “Reconciliation, Justice and Peace.” The theme of the 2008 AMECEA Plenary Assembly was “Reconciliation through Justice and Peace.” The theme of the 2009 Kenya Lenten Campaign was “Justice, Reconciliation and Peace.” The word order depends on the specific context and circumstances and the local interpretation. In general we seminar participants felt that this is an ongoing process in which real justice comes first. Then this leads to genuine reconciliation and finally to a more lasting peace. This is reflected in name of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission in Kenya.

We agreed that after any kind of violence in the “Justice Stage” the wrongdoer/offender/perpetrator has to admit his or her mistake and make some kind of compensation/amends where appropriate. This is part of restorative justice where stolen cattle have to be returned, a burned house repaired, etc. The person wronged/the victim has to genuinely forgive the wrongdoer while a slow process of dialog, healing and reconciliation takes place. This is solemnized by some kind of official ritual/ceremony and the use of symbols. All this can lead to a lasting peace. How SCCs participate in this process is found in the Case Study of Tegeti Parish described earlier.

Our seminar also explored SCCs’ involvement in community development in Africa (social transformation through community-based organizations). The basic questions are: What is the Catholic Church’s participation in social change, social transformation and community development, especially at the Small Christian Community level?³⁸ How can Small Christian Community members develop a deeper social consciousness and act as real agents of social change? This change is not simply change for change’s sake, but is deeply rooted in the gospel.

A Case Study is the neighborhood communities in Kisumu, Kenya. Kenyan layman Alphonse Omolo explains how SCCs are at the heart of this community development process and outreach:

Neighborhood ministries, such as prayer, visiting the sick, counseling the emotionally afflicted, helping the needy and other services, have been transformed into projects so that they can provide functional and sustainable relief to the growing complexities of the community quandary. These projects were started to give a holistic approach to community challenges over and above pastoral ministry. Now in 2004 they include community based health care, home-based health care, voluntary counseling and testing, nutrition clinics, treatment clinics, a community health information center, social counseling, child counseling, street visits, temporary shelter, recreation, and rehabilitation for street children. Other projects are a child right’s center, nursery school, non-formal education, art school, training in carpentry, masonry, computer graphics, girls’ domestic training, a community ambulance, plastic waste recycling, textile production, a community savings and credit bank and a community study library.

³⁸ SCCs are used as Case Study Reference Groups in Community Development, Action and Mobilization Studies in two courses at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya.

The SCCs remain at the heart of these projects. Each community has nominated and sponsored members for specific training to work in an area of immediate neighborhood concern. For instance, this might be as a counselor, community health worker, nutritionist, traditional birth attender, youth development representative or child counselor. The training is carried out in the homes of the community members and sometimes in the community centers or prayer houses. The other members of the community volunteer to prepare meals during the training workshops. Those trained offer relevant services within their neighborhood voluntarily and without any discrimination. Their voluntary work covers the geographical area of their SCCs and the services are offered to any one in need whether Catholic or not.³⁹

Kalilombe, one of the original architects of the SCCs plan in Eastern Africa, emphasizes that in the different stages of growth in SCCs the final stage is the "Transformation of Society." This means going beyond superficial changes to tackle the necessary structural and systemic changes in our society such as facing the underlying tribal and negative ethnic group tensions in Kenya and other countries today, corruption/graft, insecurity and ongoing poverty. A process/methodology such as the Pastoral Spiral can help in this transformation.

"Can the Pastoral Circle Transform a Parish" by Christine Bodewes in *The Pastoral Circle Revisited: A Critical Quest for Truth and Transformation* edited by Frans Wijzen, Peter Henriot and Rodrigo Mejia, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005 and Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006 (pp. 77-93) is a Case Study from the Kibera Slums in Nairobi, Kenya that documents how the communal use of the pastoral circle in SCCs can transform a parish.⁴⁰

An interesting example of SCCs responding to the contemporary signs of the times is the changes in the languages used in SCC Bible Services and Meetings due to population shifts in urban areas in Africa. Kenyan Consolata seminarian Walter Kisikwa Ingosi, IMC narrates an important Case Study involving a critical incident when two non-Gikuyu speaking families moved into an all Gikuyu speaking area of St John the Baptist Parish, Riruta in Nairobi Archdiocese. He explains how after much discussion in their meetings the St. Maria Goretti SCC members

were willing to solve it [the language issue] once and for all by allowing all their meetings to be done in Kiswahili. They acknowledged what had taken place and asked forgiveness from the two families. This was a very important decision that brought everyone home. They were able to decide themselves and join together in a way that will unite them together.⁴¹

³⁹ Alphonse Omolo, "Small Communities Light up Neighborhoods in Kisumu" in Healey and Hinton, *Small Christian Communities Today*, p. 112.

⁴⁰ See a fuller explanation in Christine Bodewes, *Parish Transformation in Urban Slums: Voices of Kibera, Kenya*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2005.

⁴¹ Walter Ingosi, "A Challenge of Using Different Languages in a SCC," Nairobi: Unpublished Paper, 2013, p. 4.

Ugandan Missionaries of Africa seminarian Didus Baguma, MAfr presents a similar critical incident in a Case Study entitled “Addressing the Issue of Negative Ethnicity in Small Christian Communities in Kenya.” St. Felista SCC, Kaberera in Our Lady Queen of Africa, South B Parish, Nairobi Archdiocese was composed of different ethnic groups and used Swahili, the national language. But the Gikuyu-speaking members did not want to associate with the rest and would all the time speak their own local language in the weekly meetings that no any other member understood. On social occasions they don’t eat the food prepared but instead carried always their own traditional Kikuyu dish and shared it among themselves in one corner. In fact they preferred to attend and participate in a distant Gikuyu-speaking *jumuiya* far off from their residences and outside the parish demarcations.

As an animator and reconciler Didus encouraged all the SCC members to discuss together the evils of tribalism and exclusiveness and how they could resolve their differences together stating:

The way forward to foster unity among a community divided on ethnic lines is a challenge because individuals are products of their ethnic groups and to keep its tradition is to safeguard its identity, values and sense of belonging. However as we become Christians we are open to the spirit of universal inclusiveness advocated by Jesus whom we follow. This is a message that as pastors we can preach to the *wanajumuiya*... This challenges the SCC members to realize the greater value of belonging to the small [inclusive] family that has a greater Christian value above ethnic groups.⁴²

Recently I have been participating in discussions⁴³ on how, when and where African SCCs have evolved from devotional and liturgical groups (prayer) to developmental groups (“See,” “Judge” and “Act” process) to liberative groups (actions for structural change).⁴⁴ Does each phase incorporate and build upon the previous one? Is there a natural evolution for SCC members to become social activists?⁴⁵ An all-encompassing answer is: “It depends on the local context.” If you have a strict pastoral, parish-based model of SCCs where the emphasis is on the sacraments and devotional life, social activism is less likely to take place: If parishes have Parish and Subparish Justice and Peace Commissions (also called Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commissions) and use the “See, “Judge” and “Act” process in their

⁴² Didus Baguma, “A Day in a Jumuiya and Addressing the Issue of Negative Ethnicity in the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Kenya,” Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website, retrieved on 24 February, 2014, <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/africa/kenya/236-a-day-in-a-jumuiya-and-addressing-the-issue-of-negative-ethnicity-in-the-small-christian-communities-sccs-in-kenya.html>

⁴³ See exchanges with American theologian layman Terence McGoldrick by email, phone and Skype in July and August, 2013.

⁴⁴ These stages or types of church are based on Francisco Claver, *Making of a Local Church*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008, pp. 92-94.

⁴⁵ See Francisco Claver, for an elaboration of this natural evolution of BECs, chapter 7.

weekly SCCs gatherings, social activism can easily take place. A good example is Kenya, especially related to the annual Kenya Lenten Campaign.

In various AMECEA countries the episcopal conferences have issued good statements on social justice but other priorities (“the local context”) take over. An example is Tanzania where the SCCs are heavily involved in fund raising and financial self-reliance.

It is significant that theologians continue to write serious articles on SCCs. American lay theologian J. J. Carney writes about

the biggest contemporary challenge facing both SCCs and the African church—namely their engagement with issues of social justice, peace, and reconciliation. Here I argue that the growing SCC emphasis on social analysis and social justice could be further developed through more intentional theological reflection on the Eucharistic politics implicit in the Small Christian Community.⁴⁶

He presents a specific case study of the challenges in Uganda:

Many East African SCCs have struggled to move towards a more concrete engagement with issues of social justice and reconciliation. While reiterating to me their commitment to providing social assistance and burial funds for members, SCC leaders in Luweero, Uganda described the *raison d’être* of their groups in terms of parish fundraising and community socializing. In particular, they reflected a marked reticence towards anything deemed “political,” including conflict resolution or social reconciliation. In the words of one leader, “we [SCCs] don’t engage in politics . . . if people need to resolve conflicts they go to the police.”⁴⁷

The planning and realization of the African Year of Reconciliation (AYR), recommended by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI in No. 157 of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* (hereafter referred to by its English title *Africa Commitment*) -- “In order to encourage reconciliation in communities, I heartily recommend, as did the Synod Fathers, that each country celebrates yearly a day or week of reconciliation” -- was among the objectives of a workshop on Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa under the auspices of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) in partnership with Missio, Aachen that took place in Accra, Ghana from 24-26 November, 2014. The theme of the workshop was “Small Christian Communities: Moving towards the African Year of Reconciliation and Sharing with Other Churches.” The 13 delegates came from 12 Africa countries: Benin, Cameroon, DRC, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The three delegates from Eastern Africa were Father Don Bosco Ochieng Onyalla, CANAA Coordinator, Nairobi, Kenya; Father Ferdinand Barugize, Executive Secretary of the Pastoral Department, Kigoma

⁴⁶ J. J. Carney, “The People Bonded Together by Love: Eucharistic Ecclesiology and Small Christian Communities in Africa,” *Modern Theology* 30: 2, April, 2014, p. 301.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

Diocese, Tanzania and Father Joseph Komakoma originally from Zambia and now Secretary General of SECAM, Accra, Ghana.

The meeting was a follow-up of the September, 2012 Nairobi workshop that discussed the commitment of SCCs in the process of reconciliation in Africa in the light of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africa's Commitment* that encouraged each African country to mark on annual basis “a day or week of reconciliation, particularly during Advent or Lent,” and mandated SECAM to facilitate the realization of these celebrations whose purpose would be “to encourage reconciliation in communities.”

In closing the workshop Archbishop Jean-Marie Speich, the Apostolic Nuncio in Ghana, acknowledged with appreciation the initiative of organizing the workshop on SCCs in Africa by SECAM, but challenged the participants to ensure a shift from “words and speeches” to feasible recommendations and “facts.”⁴⁸ The nuncio further appealed to Christian communities in Africa to take inspiration from the family of Mary, Joseph and Jesus, calling it “the best example of the first Small Christian Community.” “Look at the Holy Family: people with a lot of problems, people followed, persecuted, poor; they had concrete, normal problems, coming to Africa, going out of Africa and living in Israel, in Palestine. The Holy Family is the ‘Patron/[Patroness] of the Small Christian Communities’ to which all SCCs have to be consecrated.”⁴⁹

At the conclusion of their deliberations, having been enriched by the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africa's Commitment* taken within the perspective of the ecclesial and social practices of Small Christian Communities (SCCs), and in view of the need for a reconciling Church as Family of God, the participants made following resolutions and recommendations:

1. In line with *Africa's Commitment*, *Evangelii Gaudium* (hereafter referred to by its English title *The Joy of the Gospel*) and the final message of SECAM's 2013 Plenary Assembly, to create SCCs where they do not exist, and to strengthen existing ones.
2. Have harmonious and structural relations between families and SCCs so that families enrich SCCs and that these SCCs support families.
3. Promote the awareness of SCCs among members, giving priority to the biblical apostolate and social analysis.
4. Prioritize the actions and practices of Small Christian Communities in genuine reconciliation (*Africa's Commitment* 21) anchored in truth (*Africa's Commitment* 20).
5. Set up regional collaboration teams at the level of SCCs to evaluate and to define actions and strategies to be implemented for SCCs reconciling mission.
6. Renew theological research by integrating theologians in the SCCs including the training of candidates to ministries in accordance with the reality of SCCs.
7. Constitute an *ad hoc* team, which will continue the work begun in Accra and will organize in August, 2015 in Burkina Faso, a meeting of resource persons in view of

⁴⁸ “Facts” is a word that Pope Francis likes. He says that “facts are more important than ideas.” He is referring to the existential facts on the ground or the concrete, local reality (*hali halisi* in Swahili).

⁴⁹ Jean-Marie Speich, “Africa is an “Extended Holy Land,” Nuncio in Ghana Clarifies,” Catholic News Agency for Africa (CANAA), 27 November, 2014.

an enlarged workshop for regional lay delegates involved in the pastoral care of SCCs.⁵⁰

SECAM launched the continent-wide African Year of Reconciliation (AYR) in Accra, Ghana on 29 July, 2015 and it will run until 29 July, 2016. The theme chosen for this event was “A Reconciled Africa for Peaceful Coexistence.” All the African Episcopal Conferences are invited to organize during this year “programs and initiatives of reconciliation in collaboration with the respective commissions of Justice and Peace in their countries.” The promotion of reconciliation will involve all the other religions in Africa and will have an ecumenical outreach. SCC members are invited to participate in a day or week of reconciliation, particularly during Advent or Lent. How can we prioritize the actions and practices of Small Christian Communities in genuine reconciliation (*Africa’s Commitment*, 21) anchored in truth (*Africa’s Commitment*, 20). Can each SCC choose one concrete practical action of reconciliation on the local level?

We close with Archbishop Jean-Marie Speich, the Apostolic Nuncio in Ghana’s, challenge to the participants at our November, 2014 SCCs Meeting: to shift from “words and speeches” to feasible recommendations and “facts.” So we propose a concrete action: Join several SCC members to visit a Muslim family in your neighborhood and pray together to our One God for reconciliation and peace to happen in a particular place in Africa, for example, in a needy slum near you, the Kenya-Somalia border, South Sudan, etc. Choose your own example.

To prepare for this meeting we posted this proposed concrete action on the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/www.smallchristiancommunities.org>)

So far 12 people have clicked “Like.”

In my own St. Kizito SCC we are going to visit Juma, the Muslim neighbor of our chairperson Josphat Mulinya and his wife Fatima. Juma is retired from the railways and a busy grandfather.

Comments on SCCs Networking:

AMECEA’s long experience of SCCs networking and structures (a sharing and collaborative platform or forum) reveals:

Yes to:

1. Training Teams on all levels: Eastern Africa, National, Diocesan, Parish, Sub-parish, Outstation.
2. Coordination Teams on all levels: Eastern Africa, National, Diocesan, Parish Sub-parish, Outstation.
 - a. On the physical level: periodic meetings.

⁵⁰ “SECAM Workshop Recommends Creation and Strengthening of Small Christian Communities in Africa,” Catholic News Agency for Africa (CANAA), 27 November, 2014.

- b. On the virtual level:
 - 1. Email messages and Mailing Lists.
 - 2. Website.
 - 3. Facebook Page.
 - 4. WhatsApp Chat Group.
 - 5. Skype.

3. Diocesan Coordinator/Office: separate or within the Pastoral Office depending on the local context.

No to:

- 1. Separate SCCs Office on the levels of
 - a. AMECEA
 - b. National Catholic Secretariat
 - c. Parish.

because it is bureaucratic and top down. It should be integrated into the Pastoral Office.

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