

**2016 Report of the Small Christian
Communities (SCCs)
in the Catholic Diocese of Meru,
Kenya**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Promoting the Small Christian Communities in the Catholic Diocese of Meru, Kenya is one of the signs of the times in my beloved diocese that I have interpreted. I see in the Small Christian Communities an ideal model of the church as a family. The church will be seen as a family of families and our diocese will truly become self-ministering, self-propagating, self-supporting and self-motivating. In my effort to interpret SCCs in Meru Diocese as a sign of our times, I came across some personalities and parishes in the diocese that I acknowledge for their tremendous contribution they made toward achieving this purpose.

First, my local ordinary Bishop Salesius Mugambi, a man of great vision and a good interpreter of this sign of the times. Father Joseph Healey, MM, a Maryknoll missionary and author of SCCs books and a remarkable promoter of SCCs in Eastern Africa and in the AMECEA community, indeed an animator of SCCs *damu damu* (in the blood). Father David Murungi, PhD in Moral Theology and the Diocesan Pastoral Coordinator, for his unrelenting motivation and great ideas of success. Father Moses Muriira, MA in Pastoral Theology with a focus on Small Christian Communities and Administration, for his brotherly love and generosity of ideas, and his ardent desire to promote pastoral priority of the SCCs in the Diocese of Meru. Mujwa Parish under the leadership of the Father in charge Father Enrique Rituerto. Chuka Parish under the Episcopal Vicar Father Dionisio Murungi. Nkubu Parish which has given immense support to the SCCs coordination through its leadership of the Father in charge and the coordinator of SCCs in his Deanery of Imenti South. Mbaranga Parish with ardent and self-motivated priests. Mikinduri Parish with a track record and history of SCCs' proper animation that attracts large numbers of participants to the workshops. Michaka Parish through the outstanding leadership and coordination of the parish priest Father Matthias Mativo. Buuri, Laare, Amung'enti and Mutuati Parishes receive acknowledgement for their success.

Besides these, are the various fathers in charge and their coworker priests who have sent their Christians to the SCCs events. The lay participants in all the workshops, meetings and seminars have honestly and actively shared and participated in these events to produce the content of this report.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Workshop objectives

The overall objective of the workshops on the Small Christian Communities was to build the capacity of the lay faithful and their on-going formation. This would lead to practical applications on daily living of their Catholic faith and prediction of better services in their various responsibilities given in the church, improved decision-making and better management of groups within the parish and in a specific way the Small Christian Communities (SCCs). The objective was achieved through practical demonstrations, discussions, liturgical, preparations and participations, talks by various competent speakers and sharing experiences.

1.2 Workshop participation

Since the year 2014 the workshops on Small Christian Communities have given a progressive trend due to the attraction of participants from all the parishes within Meru Diocese. In November, 2014 only 10 parishes participated, with 34 participants and in April 2015 the participation improved to 26 parishes with 42 participants. In November 2015 31 parishes participated and the number of participants was recorded at 58. In April, 2016 the workshop attracted 78 participants

from 32 parishes while the most recent workshop in November, 2016 attracted 120 participants from 36 parishes. It was initially anticipated that only 100 participants would attend the workshop from various parishes within the Diocese of Meru. However, 20 more participants came to the workshop reflecting the growing awareness and interest in Small Christian Communities as important ecclesial groups in the church. Complete lists of the attendants have been preserved in the file. These workshops are purely funded by the parishes who send their SCCs leaders.

1.3 Workshop program

The programs for the workshops are given in the two Annexes with the major topics addressed within the program included.

1.4 Official opening of the workshop

The Bishop of Meru Diocese, Bishop Salesius Mugambi formally opened the November, 2016 workshop with the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist early in the morning. In his remarks, he observed that Small Christian Communities are significantly important in the Catholic Church and with good coordination from their parishes they can bring Christians together and become centers of deepening the Word of God and cohesive faith sharing groups. He noted that the central coordination of Small Christian Communities in Meru Diocese is happening this time as a historical moment since there has been no such central coordination office in the diocese. He gave a challenge of getting the proper Kimeru word to identify Small Christian Communities.

He thanked the participants for their attendance and encouraged them to own these groups and make them avenues of sharing the challenges they go through in their Christian living. However, he discouraged the misconception of Small Christian Community as clan-based or social class-based. Rather it should be a neighborhood church from the families.

2. PRACTICAL SESSIONS

2.1 Small Christian Communities meetings

During the workshops the participants are organized into small communities or groups which are given the names of the saints. These groups become the model of SCCs in the parishes. In these groups, they are allocated time for discussions on various topics presented during the day. After group discussions, they are given more time for group presentations on their findings and the possible pastoral solutions depending on the topic of discussion.

In these groups the number of the members is taken into consideration. The time taken by the groups is as well an opportunity to educate on time management. The atmosphere of discussion and the coordination during these discussions is put into consideration to foster these skills in the group's meeting. After every group meeting, there was an evaluation to determine whether there was the right atmosphere of group meeting, every member was listened to, every member felt appreciated by others and so on.

2.2 Gospel sharing method

Since these groups took the model of Small Christian Communities in the parish, we focused on the seven steps method of Gospel sharing of the Sunday Gospel text. This emphasis emanated from the understanding that various parishes in the diocese are familiar with it and would find it more comfortable due to various reasons of age difference, different levels of understanding among the members, time factors and the need to have harmonious and common method across the entire diocese.

2.3 Leadership skills

To form and train more on leadership, different participants were given different responsibilities to manage the entire group and ensure the coordination of all during the workshop period. Every evening the leaders within the group would meet to evaluate how the day has been spent, where something was not properly done, who was responsible, what can be done, who can do it and above all to evaluate on their teamwork spirit. This was meant to foster the sense of responsibility as a leader and to identify as a leader one's weaknesses and improve for the productive leadership and maintaining the group as one. By doing this, one would learn the role of a leader.

3. PASTORAL CHALLENGES ON SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

From the workshops held on Small Christian Communities and from the various visits and interactions with groups of SCCs leaders in some parishes I mentioned above, the following pastoral challenges affect SCCs:

3.1 Importance of SCCs

Sometimes there is a general indifference on the importance of SCCs in the parish. The big assumption is that when other groups are in place and are well coordinated, the parish can move on well. However, the general disposition should be that SCCs are the centers of Gospel sharing and Christian BONDING. Due to lack of understanding of the importance of SCCs within a parish, Christians are sometimes left alone in some parishes without a pastor to guide them on the proper understanding of their roles as SCCs leaders and they end up perceiving themselves as of no importance in the leadership of the parish. Viewing SCCs as important groups that generate leadership of the parish is as strong as the information that will trickle down to all the Christians without disregarding anybody.

3.2 Leadership

In many parishes, the leadership of SCCs lacks representation on the parish level (that is, on the Parish Pastoral Council). This brings about disconnection and may lead to suppression of certain types of leaders who may have a strong will, love and energy to lead. There could be silent observers who think that parish leadership is for some people and not themselves because from where these leaders emerge is an issue known to only a few. Due to lack of this SCCs representation on the parish level, it has also remained unclear who should attend workshops, seminars, meetings and how will they be funded. After the SCCs workshops, it came out clearly that some participants are not recognized and therefore denied opportunity to implement what they have been trained for and this leads to discouragement and indifference. Hence SCCs are left at the level of feelings.

3.3 Clannism

From the various groups' discussions, this is created by the natural factor of family bond which may be favored by geographical closeness of the families and the required number of families to form SCC. However, every group acknowledged from their discussion that this can make a solidly active SCC group and the vice versa can be disastrous not only to the SCC but also to the prayer house level. Therefore, this is pastoral issue that requires proper handling even by the pastor himself. The general agreement by the participants is that if these families are bonded together by love this type of SCC should be encouraged within the parish. However, the challenge on this remains when one or two families not belonging to these other families bonded by their clan happen to be in their midst geographically. These one or two families will feel out of place. Yet

their feelings and sentiments can be listened to, taking note that they are together in other social events in life.

3.4 Money

During the discussions and my visits in the parishes the issue of money/finance comes out clearly. Some Christians avoid SCC meetings where finance is the key agenda in their weekly meetings. It is even more worse when the leaders have a big temptation to misuse the money whether it be the grassroots or top leadership. Nevertheless, the need for charitable works that require some kind of monetary contribution has no damage and is acceptable. The participants express their great appreciation when the pastor makes visits to the SCC meetings, celebrate Mass in the days of their patron saints or in any other time. In most cases the members are happy and grateful to share their monetary gifts to the priest. Regarding this challenge, where the focus of financial contribution is directed to matters a lot.

3.5 Time

Some members come late and therefore they have little to share or learn to edify themselves and others. Others value their time so much that they see no need of sacrificing it to be with others in the SCCs.

3.6 Communication

Lack of proper information on what is happening in the other SCCs in the parish can lead to a feeling that we are alone and doing the wrong thing. The information sometimes that goes around that SCCs could be an attempt of becoming a sect. When there is good passing of information and done through the parish announcements the idea of “communion of communities” is well understood. During the workshops and meetings, the general feeling expressed is that many can participate in the workshops but the information is not early, clear or confused with the other groups that are existing in the parish. The participants clearly expressed that during Sunday announcements any information on SCCs is often poorly made or emphasized. This leaves the SCCs groups seemly less important. When also the language of love is lacking, the SCC is in jeopardy.

3.7 Social class

The gap between the rich and the poor kills the spirit of coming together and sharing. This creates an atmosphere of domination from the class of those who have and a suppression of the poor. Therefore, the spirit of brotherhood/sisterhood is not there and this leads to withdrawal of members at the expense of the SCC as a community. These members who separate themselves or withdraw from SCCs may have difficulties to appreciate the church and therefore even their unity/communion with the church may vanish and the reception of sacraments may not be meaningful and they may go to other churches or faiths. The image of the church as a family of God may be blurred in them.

4. PASTORAL RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Awareness programs

This can be testified from the number of workshops and meetings on SCCs that has been progressive. To integrate relevant training, Christians must be made aware of and attend such workshops, seminars and meetings.

- It is the initiative of the bishop to talk about SCCs and to instill a desire in the priests and Christians.
- In the priests’ meetings SCCs progress should be accounted for.

- Have *Jumuiya* days as deaneries and as a diocese to meet the leaders of SCCs, discuss SCCs and to celebrate Mass together.
- Compose music with a theme on SCCs to run across the diocese within the parishes.

4.2 On-going formation

- It would be appropriate to train more leaders on SCCs.
- To make affordable the training of more leaders it would be advisable to start our local Lumko Training in Meru Diocese.
- The period of training these leaders must be sufficient enough to award them certificates of training.
- It would be more enriching if the catechists are incorporated in this course to have a strong enduring catechesis on SCCs.
- Form a team of trainers in the local Lumko Training.

4.3 Finance

- Outsource some money to reinforce the progress of the good work already happening.
- To facilitate frequent visits to the parishes for follow-up and evaluation.
- To promote these workshops, seminars and SCCs diocesan meetings.
- To have a pastoral vehicle for the SCCs Department in the diocese.
- To produce brochures and pamphlets on SCCs.
- To pack information coupled with effective communication on SCCs.
- To have proper machines and stationery for the SCC Department.

4.4 Leadership

- Have leadership from grassroots to the top level that is well structured and represented at the:
 - Diocesan level
 - Deanery level
 - Parish level - Parish Pastoral Council
 - Prayer House (outstation) level
 - SCC level
- Have well trained leaders.
 Leadership that emphasizes the importance of SCCs.
 Youth to be part of the leadership training on SCCs.

NB:

The above recommendations are not conclusive, but open for further research. However, a few can be appropriate for action to ensure progressive growth for further research since SCCs are within the pastoral set up of the church and each time there are new pastoral challenges emerging with the changing times.

REFERENCES

1. *SCCs Workshop, 20 September 2014, St. Michael Retreat Centre.*
2. *Visits of SCCs leaders and meetings, Mbaranga Parish, 17 July 2014.*
3. *SCCs Workshop, 9 - 13 April 2015, St. Michael Retreat Centre.*
4. *SCCs Workshop, 14 - 17 November 2015, St. Michael Retreat Centre.*
5. *Visit of SCCs leaders and meetings, Chuka, Nkubu, Mujwa, Riji, Mikinduri, Buuri, and Nchaure Parishes.*
6. *SCCs Workshop, 11 - 14 April 2016, St. Michael Retreat Centre.*
7. *SCCs workshop, 14 - 18 November 2016, St. Michael Retreat Centre.*

8. *Pastoral experience in the ministry and places of work.*

9. *Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Global Collaborative Website (including the “Facebook Page”)*

www.smallchristiancommunities.org

ANNEX 1

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF MERU
SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES OFFICE
COORDINATORS' WORKSHOP - ST. MICHAEL RETREAT CENTRE
FROM 11 - 14 APRIL 2016

<u>DAY</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>ACTIVITY</u>
Monday - 11 April	4.00 - 6.00 p.m.	Reporting and registration
	7.00 - 8.00 p.m.	Introduction
	8.00 - 8.45 p.m.	Supper
	8.45 - 9.00 p.m.	Night prayer
	9.00 p.m.	Retire
Tuesday - 12 April	7.00 - 8.00 a.m.	HOLY MASS
	8.00 - 8.30 a.m.	Breakfast
	9.00 - 10.30 a.m.	1st session
	10.30 - 11.00 a.m.	Tea break
	11.00 - 12.55 p.m.	2nd session
	12.55 - 1.00 p.m.	Regina Coeli
	1.00 - 2.00 p.m.	Lunch
	2.00 - 3.00 p.m.	3rd session
	3.30 - 4.00 p.m.	Tea break
	4.00 - 5.00 p.m.	SCCs gatherings
	5.00 - 6.00 p.m.	Sharing
	7.00 - 7.30 p.m.	HOLY ROSARY
	7.30 - 8.10 p.m.	Supper
8.20 - 9.00 p.m.	Communications, night prayer	
Wednesday - 13 April	7.30 - 8.00 a.m.	Morning prayer
	8.00 - 8.30 a.m.	Breakfast
	9.00 - 10.30 a.m.	1st session
	10.30 - 11.00 a.m.	Tea break
	11.00 - 12.55 p.m.	2nd session
	12.55 - 1.00 p.m.	Regina Coeli
	1.00 - 2.00 p.m.	Lunch
	2.00 - 3.00 p.m.	3rd session
	3.30 - 4.00 p.m.	Tea break
	4.00 - 5.00 p.m.	SCCs gatherings
	5.00 - 6.00 p.m.	HOLY MASS
	7.00 - 7.30 p.m.	HOLY ROSARY
	7.30 - 8.10 p.m.	Supper
8.20 - 9.00 p.m.	Communications, night prayer	
Thursday - 14 April	7.00 - 8.00 a.m.	HOLY MASS
	8.00 - 8.30 a.m.	Breakfast

<u>DAY</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>ACTIVITY</u>
	9.00 - 10.30 a.m.	1st session
	10.30 - 11.00 a.m.	Tea break
	11.00 - 12.55 p.m.	2nd session
	12.55 - 1.00 p.m.	Regina Coeli
	1.00 - 2.00 p.m.	Lunch
	2.00 p.m.	Departure

ANNEX 2

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF MERU
SCCs WORKSHOP 2016
FROM 14 - 18 NOVEMBER 2016

PROGRAM OF ACTIVITIES
GENERAL THEME: FORMATION AND TRAINING OF SCCs LEADERS

<u>DAY</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>ACTIVITY</u>
Monday - 14 November	2.00 - 6.00 p.m.	Reporting and registration
	6.00 - 7.00 p.m.	Introduction and enthronement of the <i>Bible</i>
	8.00 p.m.	Supper
	9.00 p.m.	Prayers and retire
Tuesday - 15 November	6.30 a.m.	Rising
	7.00 - 8.00 a.m.	OPENING HOLY MASS
	8.00 a.m.	Breakfast
	9.00 - 10.30 a.m.	1st session – AMECEA PRIORITY ON SCCs, PASTORAL CHALLENGES ON SCCs, DIVIDING THE LARGER SCCs
	11.00 - 1.00 p.m.	2nd session - TYPES OF LEADERS
	2.00 - 3.30 p.m.	3rd session - SCCs and PARISH EXPERIENCE
	4.00 p.m.	Tea break
	4.30 - 5.30 p.m.	SCCs meetings
	6.00 - 7.00 p.m.	4th session - GROUPS AND REASONS WHY PEOPLE JOIN GROUPS
	7.00 p.m.	Supper
8.00 - 9.00 p.m.	Group presentations	
Wednesday - 16 November	7.00 a.m.	Rising
	7.30 a.m.	Morning prayer
	8.00 a.m.	Breakfast
	9.00 - 10.30 a.m.	1st session - CENTRALITY OF THE BIBLE IN THE SCCs
	11.00 - 1.00 p.m.	2nd session - CENTRALITY OF THE BIBLE IN THE SCCs
	2.00 - 3.30 p.m.	SCCs and PARISH EXPERIENCE
	4.00 p.m.	Tea break
	4.30 - 5.30 p.m.	SCCs meetings
	6.00 - 7.00 p.m.	HOLY MASS
	8.00 - 8.30 p.m.	Supper
8.30 - 9.30 p.m.	3rd session -- GOSPEL SHARING METHODS	

<u>DAY</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>ACTIVITY</u>
Thursday - 17 November	7.00 a.m.	Rising
	7.30 a.m.	Morning prayer
	8.00 a.m.	Breakfast
	9.00 - 10.30 a.m.	LEADERSHIP STYLES
	11.00 - 1.00 p.m.	LEADERSHIP STYLES
	2.00 - 3.30 p.m.	INCULTURATION
	4.00 p.m.	Tea break
	4.30 - 5.30 p.m.	SCCs meetings
	6.00 - 7.00 p.m.	HOLY MASS
	7.00 p.m.	Supper
	8.00 - 10.00 p.m.	DECISION MAKING PROCESS
10.20 p.m.	Retire	
Friday - 18 November	7.00 a.m.	Rising
	7.30 a.m.	CLOSING MASS
	8.30 a.m.	Breakfast
	9.00 a.m.	Departure

For further information contact:

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