

Comparison Between Two Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Kenya and Tanzania

By Ezekiel Mkwe, OFM Cap

Introduction

Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa is a result of a pastoral spirit of the then Zaire Episcopal Conference (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo or DRC) in 1961 which approved a plan aimed to promote Living Ecclesial Communities that make the Catholic Church more African and to bring it closer to the people.¹ Here we notice that this idea and plan came before the Second Vatican Council. Just as the members of the early church prayed, broke bread together and owned everything in common, so also do the Small Christian Communities experience this brotherhood and sisterhood (cf. *Acts* 2:41-47). God did not invite some righteous individuals but the whole people of God to be the witnesses of salvation for all humankind. Therefore the church needs to give testimony and to live the communion (*koinonia*) of the saved community (cf. *LG*, 13).

Part I: Personal Pastoral Experience with St. Francis of Assisi SCC in Nairobi, Kenya

1. See

From the year 2014 I have been participating in the activities of St. Francis of Assisi SCC in John the Evangelist Parish in Nairobi, Kenya that take place on Sundays. We normally meet in each of the member's families in rotation every Sunday at 3 p.m. We have the opening prayer from the host and then pray the rosary. A passage from the scriptures is read and later on a few members share their reflections. If there is any activity to take place in the near future, we plan on how to go about it. For example: visiting the sick, recollections, ushering Sunday masses when it is out turn, preparing a presentation on the family day in of the parish and pilgrimages. Financial reports may also be given if necessary. We conclude with prayers of intercession and the closing prayer.

The activity that I feel I participate fully and in a special way is when it comes to preparing the family day entertainments and competition. Each SCC is normally supposed to prepare a song with the theme of a Christian family, a poem and a short drama. All these would be credited depending on the mode of presentation, the balancing of the participants (that is men, women and children) and the content. As a music teacher, I composed a song and taught the SCC members that made them win first place among seven other SCCs in 2014. In 2015 I composed another song on family and we won third place.

¹ Cf. J.G. HEALEY, "Historical Development of the Small Christian Communities/Basic Ecclesial Communities in Africa".

2. Judge

The message of the songs, poems and the drama included: encouraging families to pray together, stay together, eat together and share their joys together; participation of men in prayer and all activities of the SCC. A community of believers is built up by all believers without excluding men and children. The message was for other parishioners as well, not just members of St. Francis of Assisi SCC.

This SCC has a good number of women and children. But the challenge here is that men who participate fully are only three and the children are all girls. But in the competition on family days we win because the men show up and a few boys. This shows a false image of participation to the judges and other SCCs as they are not aware of the real situation on Sundays when we meet for prayer and sharing the Word of God.

3. Act

In making any positive changes pertaining spiritual matters, prayers are an inevitable aspect. As a community the SCC discussed and arrived at a consensus that problems like members not attending the SCC and Sunday mass especially men, immorality among the youth, sick members and the dead relatives must be put among the intentions to be prayed for during the community prayers and the private prayers in the families. Involving God is the best appeal because God enables the other actions of bringing back the weak members to succeed.

The youth and children (PMC) are encouraged, involved and followed up by their parents and the leaders to make sure that they participate fully in the parish activities whenever they are needed to do so. Up to now we have a good number of youth and children from our SCC who play a role in liturgical dancing, singing in the choir, reading the Sunday mass readings and serving at the altar. These are the future of the church as adults – well-grounded in integral and spiritual formation, God fearing and who love the church.

Part II: Reflection Paper on the Comparison between Two SCCs in Kenya and Tanzania

This comparison is between St. Francis of Assisi Small Christian Community, St. John the Evangelist Parish in Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya which I have been participating for the last three years and St. Peter Clavier, Kiraeni Parish, Moshi Diocese, Tanzania where I was born and had been a member all my childhood, during my primary education and every time I go home for holidays. The differences are based on the setting, prayer days and time, number of members, priorities, involvement in parish activities and the reasons for such differences.

DIFFERENCE	ST. PETER CLAVIER	ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI
<i>Setting/location</i>	In a village (Moshi) where majority are Catholic Christians.	In a town (Nairobi) where there is a mixture of many Christian denominations'

<i>Prayer days and time</i>	Saturday morning because many members are occupied during week days in farm work and labor employment where they start working early in the morning. On Sundays they attend mass and later in their development groups like <i>saccos</i> . ²	Sunday afternoon because on all the days of the week most members go for work where they are employed and cannot meet. On Saturdays most of them spend their time in shopping and doing house work.
<i>Number of members</i>	Eleven families which makes approximately 30 active members. Men are few but active. The rest are in towns working. Those around participate fully in the SCC prayers and other activities.	Ten families which make around 20 active members. Men work around but very few participate in the SCC. Children are the majority, but mostly girls.
<i>Pastoral priorities</i>	Communion in prayer, ensuring church marriage among the members who get married, discouraging superstition and alcoholism, togetherness in time of troubles like bereavement and sickness.	Parish activities participation like: cleanliness, family day, pilgrimage and care for orphans and those in children homes. Priorities lie more in the parish.
<i>Parish activities involvement</i>	Only when they are on duty to take the readings, clean the church and the surrounding and ushering the mass.	This is their priority. They even contribute gifts for the offertory. It is the most active SCC in the parish.

Fig. I: Differences between St. Francis of Assisi SCC and St. Peter Clavier SCC

In some aspects these two SCCs are similar. For instance the format of the prayers: rosary, Bible passage reading and sharing, leadership, financial matters and patron saint day.

SIMILARITIES	BOTH SCCs
<i>Rosary</i>	Recited in every prayer meeting. Children are encourage to lead for the sake of learning and loving it.
<i>Bible reading</i>	Read twice by different people, then silence before sharing. Everybody is ready to read.
<i>Sharing</i>	Majority are listeners, few are ready to share.
<i>Leadership</i>	Chairperson and assistant, secretary and assistant, treasure and matron (a young mother to take care of the children, especially in liturgical dancing and teaching them prayers after the meeting).
<i>Finance</i>	Monthly contribution for the SCC account. Financial report after every three months.
<i>Patron Saint day</i>	Celebration of mass in one of the SCC families. Evaluation of the SCC's progress, challenges and the way forward. Common meal, refreshments and children games.

Fig. II: Similarities between St. Francis of Assisi SCC and St. Peter Clavier SCC

² Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations.

Each SCC can still do much better by setting well their priorities in line with the message of the Gospel of the love of God and our neighbor. For instance, every member should feel responsible and free to speak out on what has struck them from the *Bible* passage read. Since the church begins in the families, when they meet in prayers in SCC, the Word of God is the most important aspect. So everybody should be thirsty to hear and share it. It is the one that binds them together.

For the family members who do not attend SCC, they can be helped by showing them a good life example nourished by the Word of God shared in the SCC so that they can be attracted by what they see and eventually they may change. So it is the task of the active members to live the Word of God by their actions because actions speak louder than words. In this way the families will experience the spiritual nourishment found in sharing the Word of God in the SCC and build up a stronger Catholic Church of Christ which aims at bringing all to him, the Lord of our salvation.

Seminarian Ezekiel Mkwe, OFM Cap
Tangaza University College
Nairobi, Kenya
ezelignasm@gmail.com